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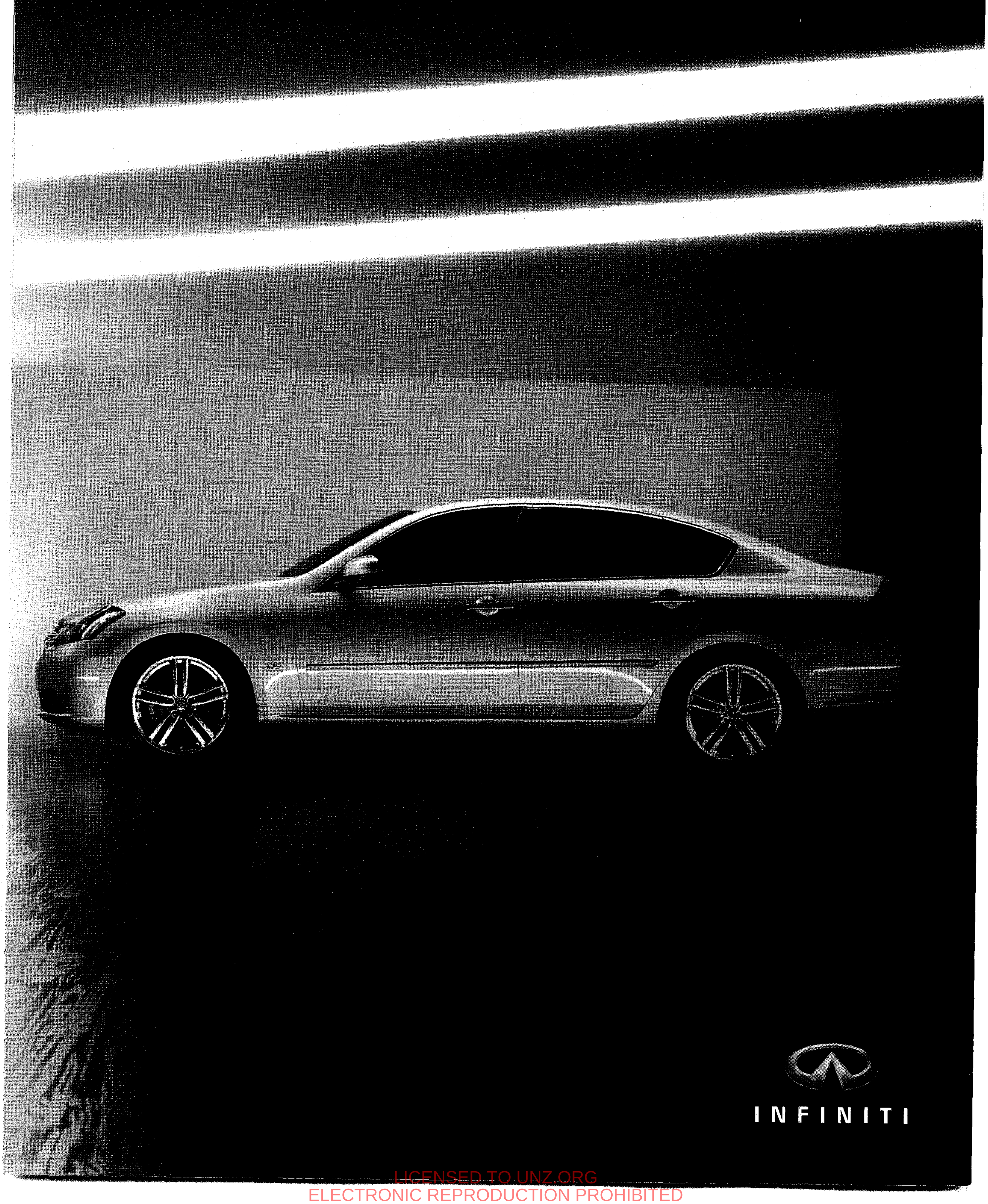

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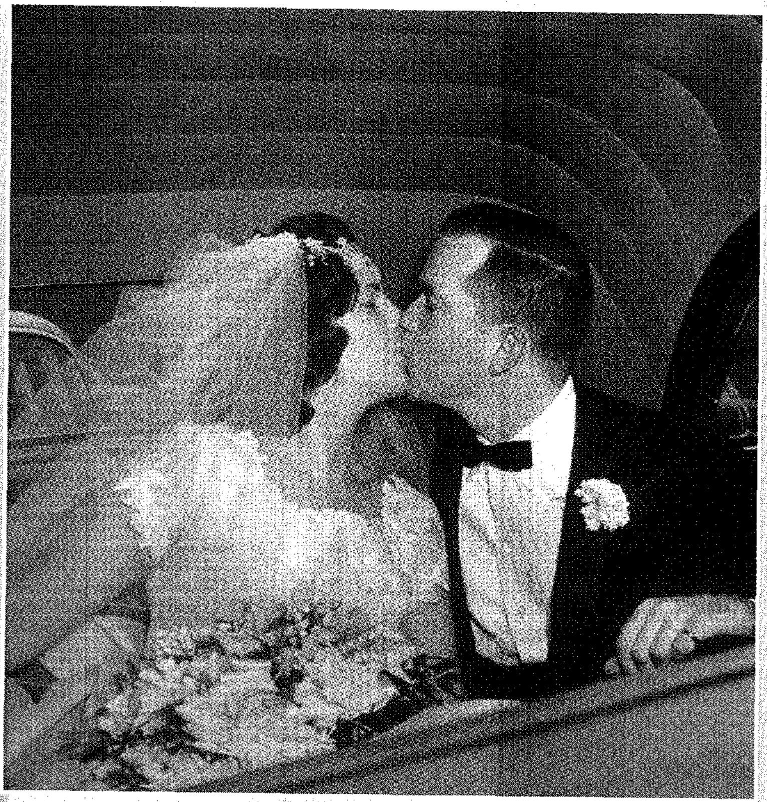

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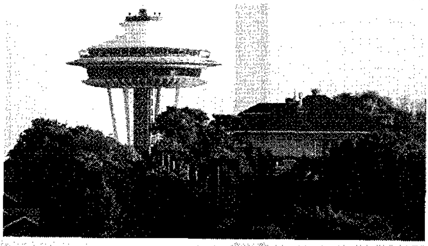

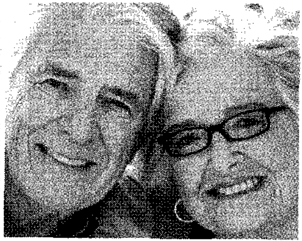

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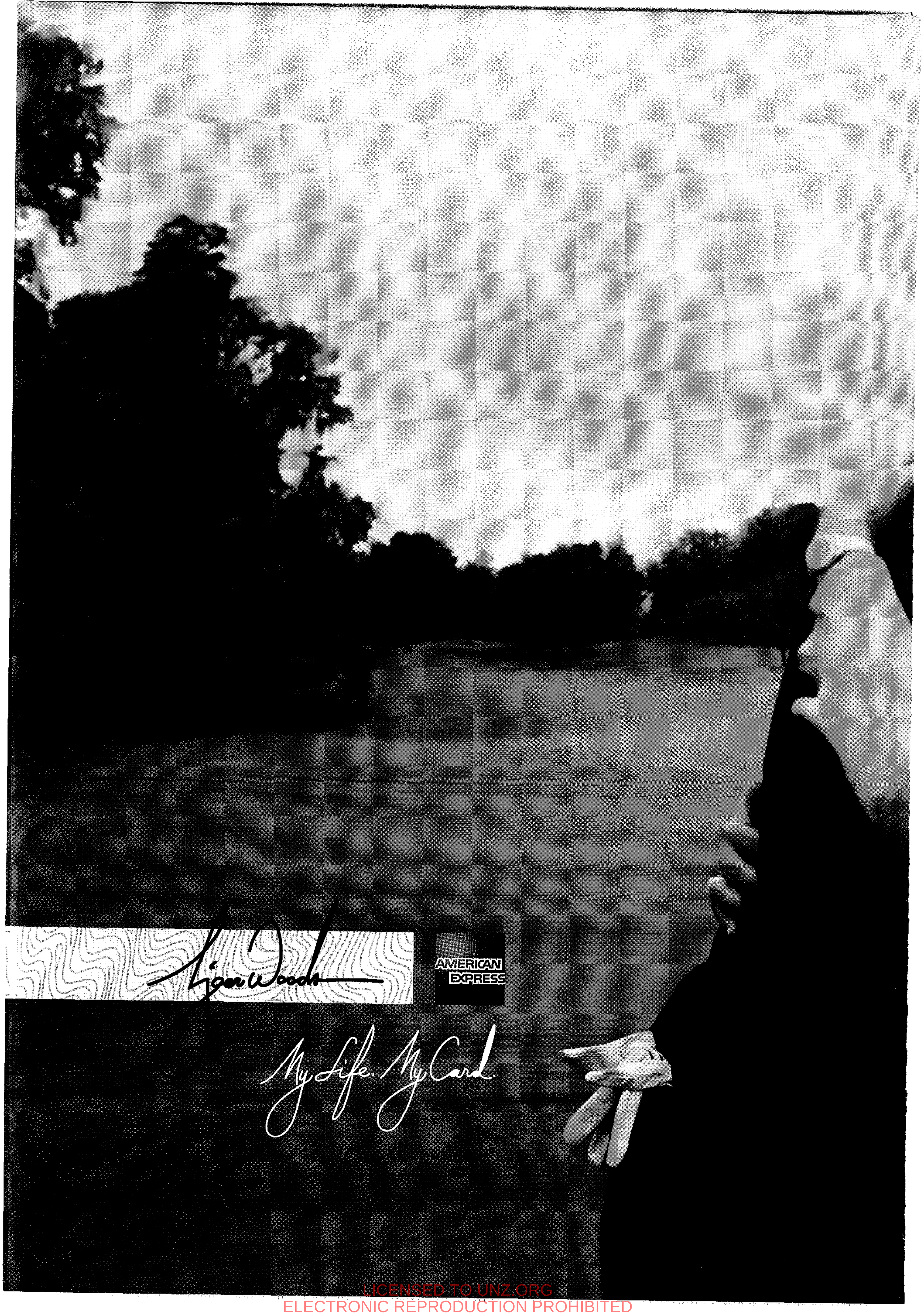
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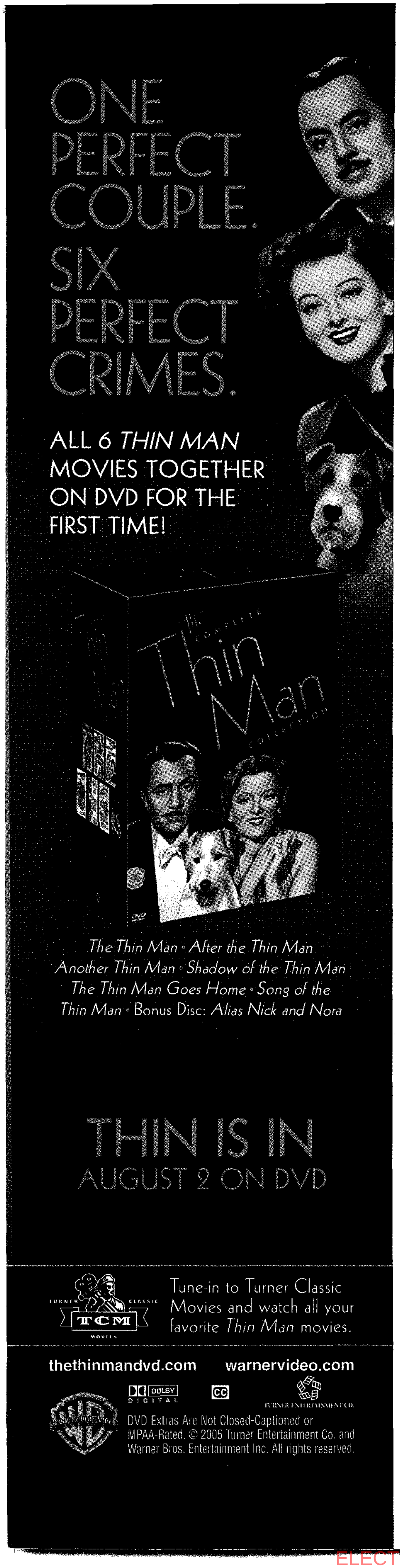
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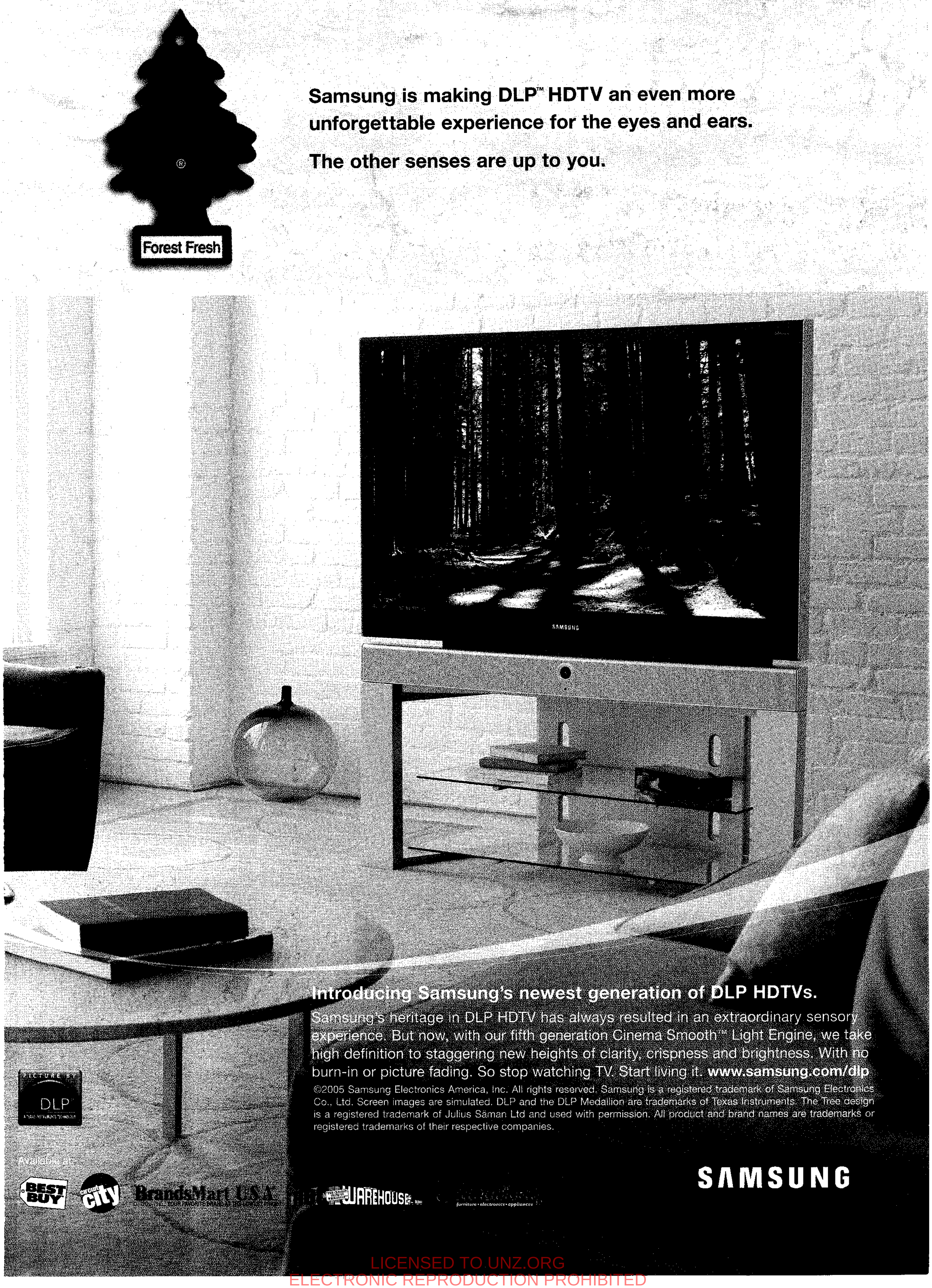
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jonathan Franzen ("My Bird Problem," p. 52) has been a contributor since 1994. His most recent book is "How to Be Alone," a collection of essays.

Elsa Walsh ("Minority Retort," p. 42) is a staff writer based in Washington.

George Packer (Comment, p. 33) has a new book, "The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq," to be published in October.

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Roberto Bolaño (Fiction, p. 78), who died in 2003, was a Chilean-born novelist and poet. Two of his novels, "By Night in Chile" and "Distant Star," have been published in English, and a collection of his short stories, "Last Evenings on Earth," will be available next spring.

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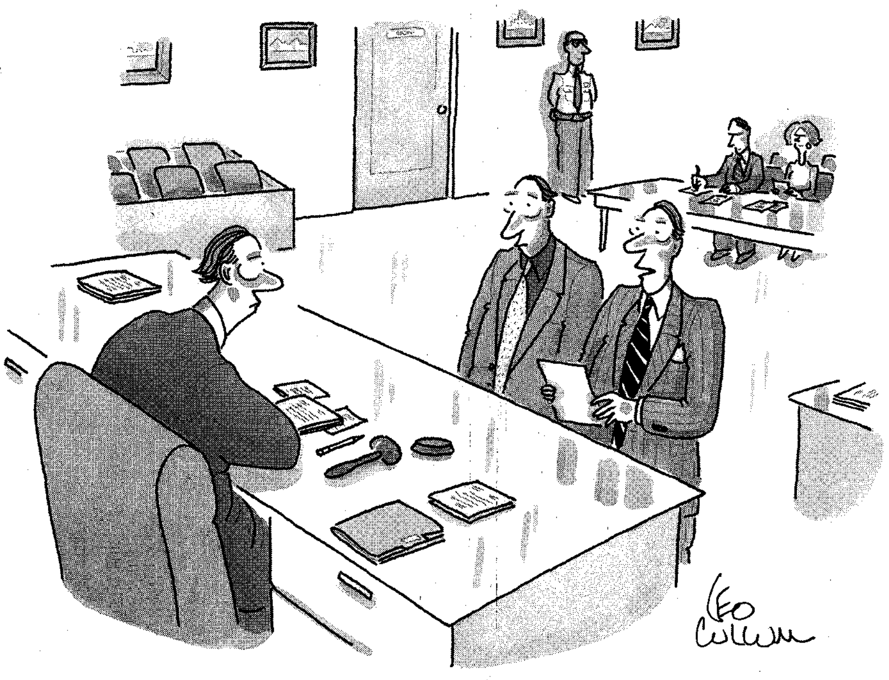

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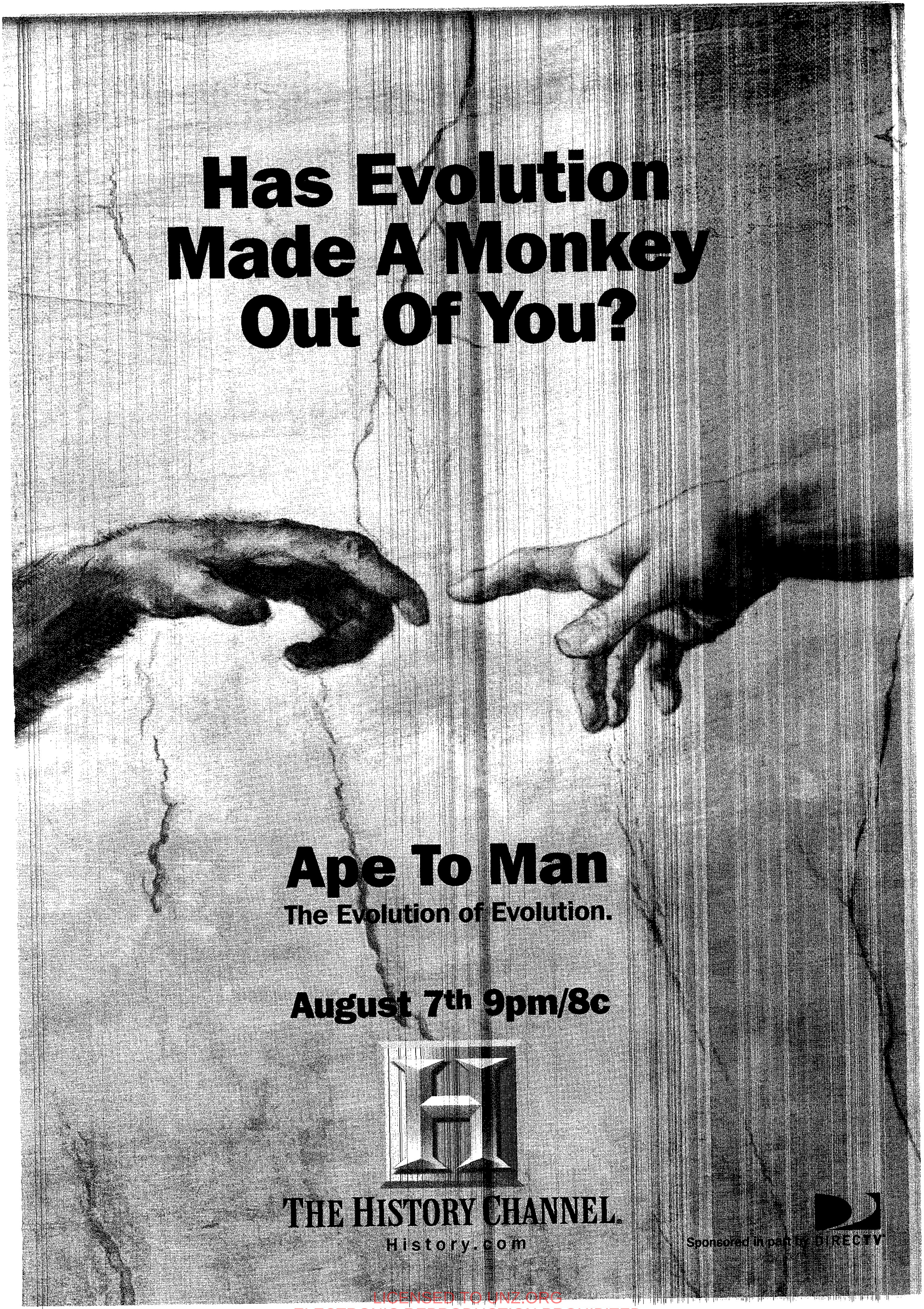
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WEB EXCLUSIVE:

Ken Auletta talks about the morning-TV wars and the future of network news.

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SCHOOL MATTERS

Margaret Talbot illuminates the sometimes ugly fights that erupt over who is chosen as valedictorian in today's competitive high schools. But the strategies employed by high-school students to boost G.P.A. scores which she mentions have implications beyond the pursuit of that honorific title ("Best in Class," June 6th). In Texas, for example, state law mandates that any student graduating in the top ten per cent of his class be granted automatic admission to any state college or university. Conversely, the high demand for placement at the University of Texas at Austin dictates that unless you are in the top ten per cent of your class you generally cannot get in. In our large suburban-Houston high school, a straight-A student who fails to get a G.P.A. boost by taking advanced-placement or honors classes would not have ranked higher than the top fourteen per cent for the past several years. As with the schools Talbot discusses, the rules of this game are routinely manipulated by more astute students, and electives without A.P. or honors credentials are shunned regardless of interest or applicability. Students with older siblings have a distinct advantage; newcomers to the system discover their strategic blunders only late in the game. With tens of thousands of dollars in college-tuition savings at stake, the dominance of G.P.A. scores affects many more students than just those few in the running for valedictorian.

Barney Issen
Houston, Texas

Hanna Rosin's story on Patrick Henry College and its ardently conservative student body leaves a memorable impression of dorm-room walls plastered with Bush-Cheney posters ("God and Country," June 27th). But why aren't all these true believers enlisting to fight in Iraq, in a war launched and directed by their heroes? While thousands of their generational peers, many non-supporters of this Administration among them, are in Iraq as a result of our "poverty" draft, the Patrick Henry students have eyes only for well-paid jobs in the White House and the Republican Party apparatus. There is an irony here that probably bypasses the students who blindly adore Dick Cheney. One supposes that, like Cheney during the Vietnam War, they "had other priorities."

Michael Myerson
Cortlandt Manor, N.Y.

As a homeschooling parent, I was sorry to read Rosin's comment about homeschooled children with political ambitions: "Homeschoolers are not the most obvious raw material for a college whose main mission, since its founding, five years ago, has been to train a new generation of Christian politicians. " I have yet to meet a homeschooling family that doesn't participate in a number of activities with groups of other children, including the homeschool workshops provided by museums, science centers, and theatres. A striking quality about many homeschooled children is their ability to converse with ease with adults, and with children much older or younger than themselves, as they have not spent most of their social lives exclusively among those within a twelve-month span of their own age. Surely having a high comfort level with a vastly larger segment of the population from childhood on would be an advantage to any future politician. As the number of homeschooling families continues to increase, I hope more of the myths surrounding the practice will be challenged.

Karla S. Bryant
Bowling Green, Ky.

•

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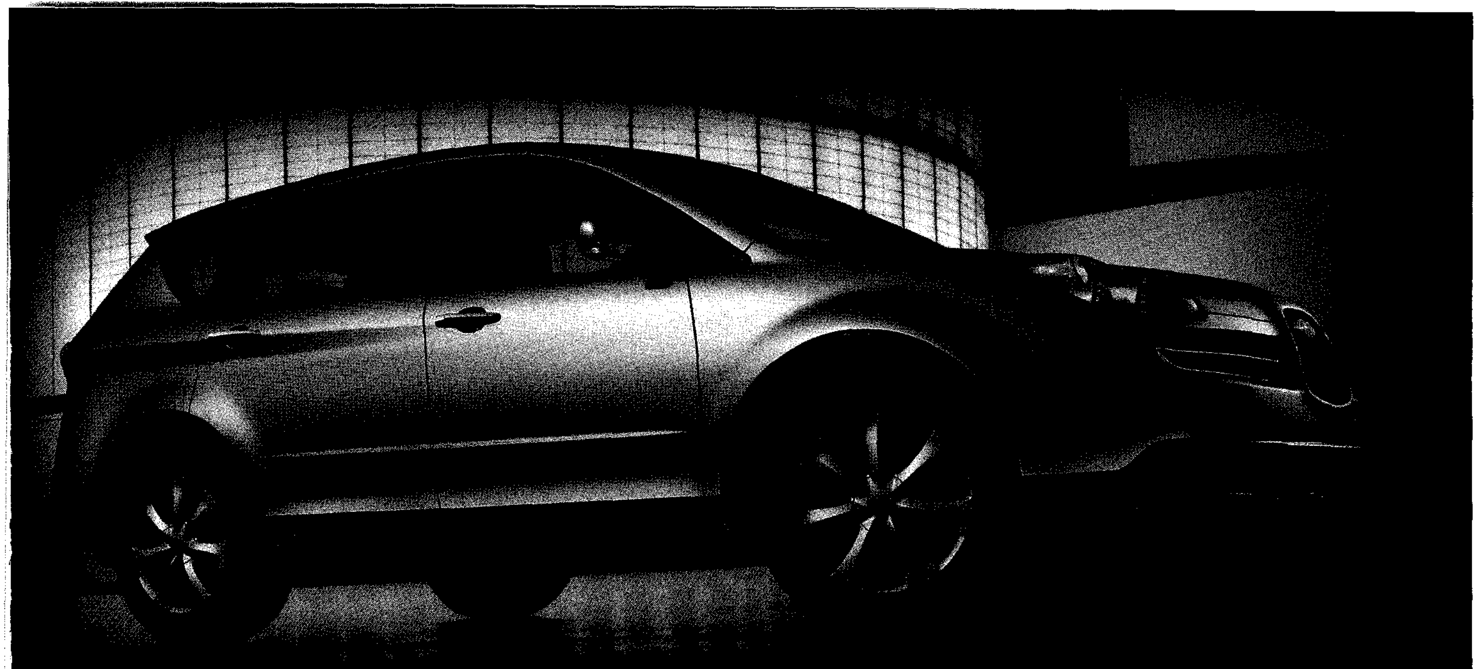

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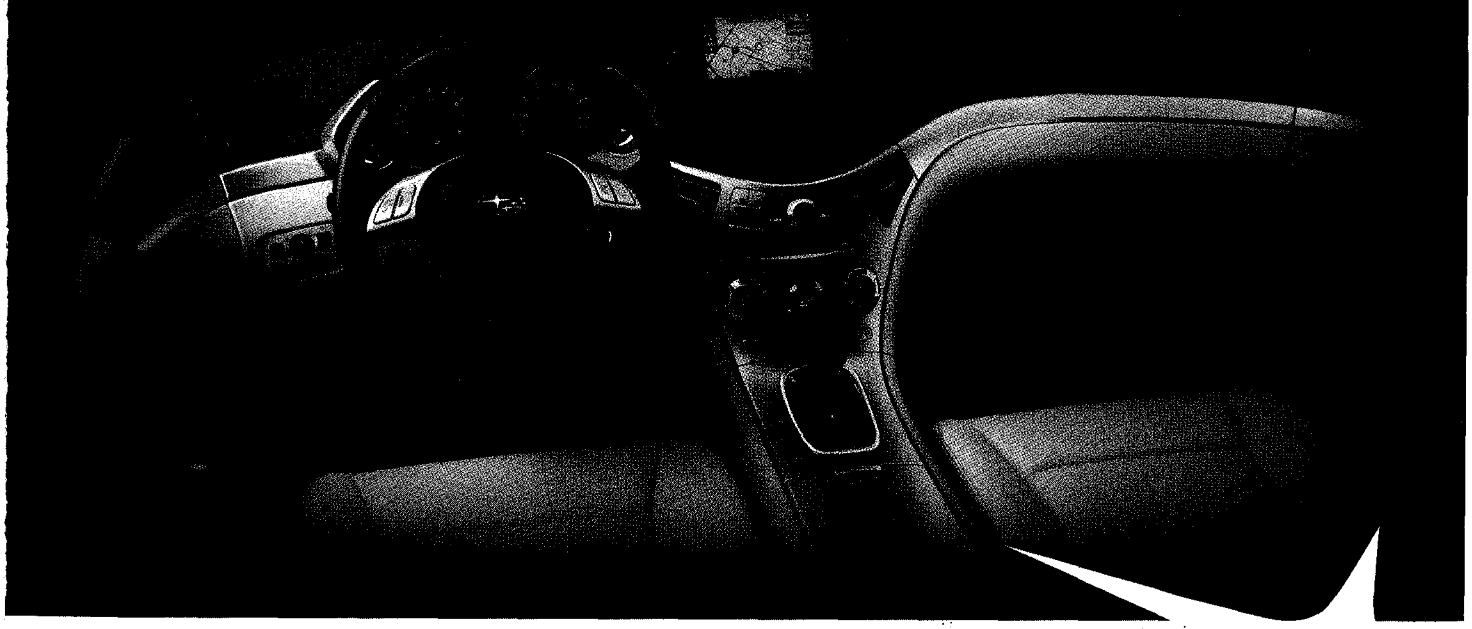

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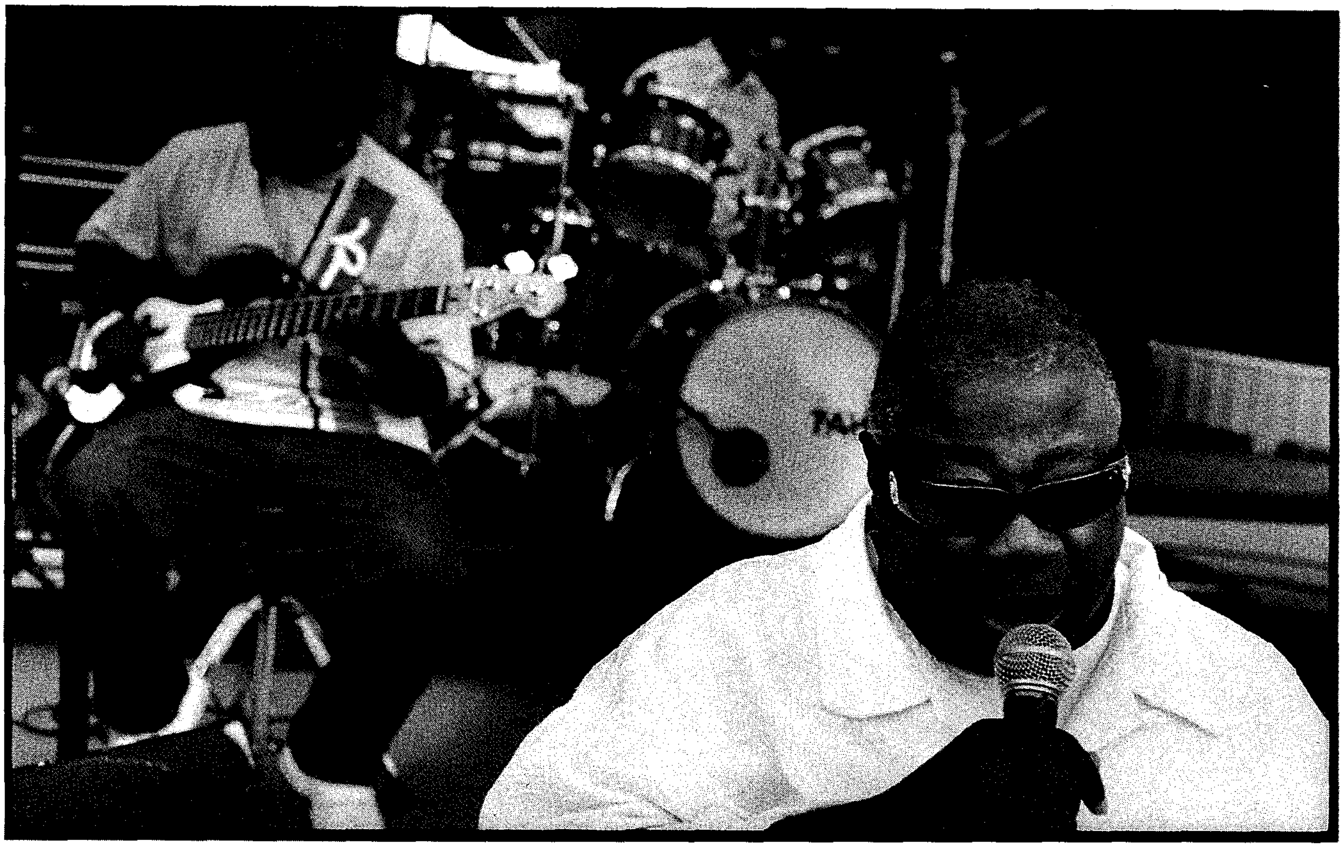

The Blind Boys of Alabama, in Central Park in July. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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14	15	16				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
LUNATIC FRINGE

Genres collide as the ninth New York International Fringe Festival takes over downtown stages, with everything from dramas about Ibsen, Richard Pryor, and Lynndie England and a dance-theatre piece about Emily Dickinson to musicals about Fleet Week and Byzantium. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
OLD YARNS

John Doe, who rose to fame as the front man for the pioneering Los Angeles punk band X, has long had a love for country music, which turns up in his solo career and when he plays with the Knitters. The band, which includes his former bandmates Exene Cervenka and D. J. Bonebrake as well as the Blasters' Dave Alvin, doesn't get together very often (they released the second album in their twenty-plus-year history only recently), but they're coming to Irving Plaza. (See page 16.)

ART
LEWITT COUNTRY

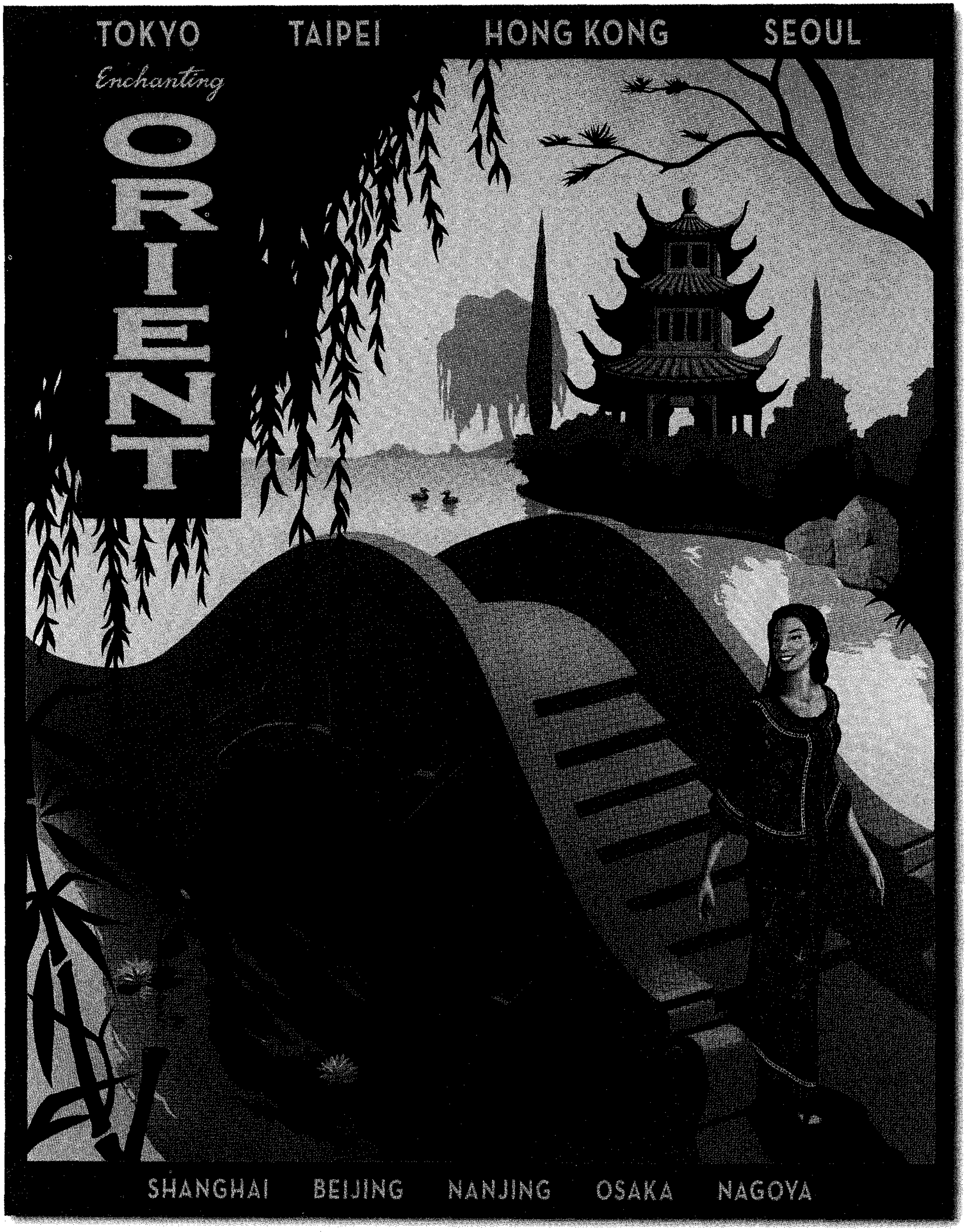
Sol LeWitt is colonizing Manhattan this summer, with exhibitions at the Met, in Madison Square Park, and now at the Pace Wildenstein Gallery in Chelsea. The enormous, labor-intensive wall drawings that make up the last of these shows have extraordinary heft, though they were executed in nothing more than pencil. (See page 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PEKING IN THE PARK

Vincent La Selva, one of the city's great Italian opera conductors, leads his New York Grand Opera company in a free performance of Puccini's "Turandot," in Central Park. (See page 24.)

MOVIES
PHILIPPE GARREL

Born in 1948, the French director Philippe Garrel has been making daringly original and often autobiographical films since he was a teen-ager. Beginning on August 8, BAM will screen a selection of Garrel's films, including "I Can No Longer Hear the Guitar," from 1991, his account of the heroin addiction and death of his muse and longtime companion, the singer Nico. (See page 28.)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THE THEATRE
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THE DEAR BOY
The Second Stage Theatre Uptown series continues with a new play by Dan O'Brien, about an English teacher who is nearing retirement and two of his pupils. Directed by Michael John Garcés ("The Cook"). In previews. Opens Aug. 8 at 7. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS
Nathan Lane, Alison Fraser, and Marian Seldes star in a new play by Terrence McNally, about an idealistic couple who yearn to buy a theatre in upstate New York. A Primary Stages production. Michael Morris directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

JOY
A romantic comedy by John Fisher, set in San Francisco, in which a group of college friends—some gay, some undecided—fall in and out of love. Directed by Ben Rimalower. In previews. Opens Aug. 14 at 7:30. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

LENNON
This musical portrait of the life and songs of John Lennon features multiple Lennons, portrayed by Will Chase and Terrence Mann, among others. Julie Danao-Salkin plays Yoko Ono. Written and directed by Don Scardino. In previews. Opens Aug. 14 at 3. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Broad parodies, political satires, biographical dramas, sexy skits, and homages to classic books and TV shows go head to head in the festival's ninth year. Nearly two hundred productions will be presented, by theatre and dance companies from twenty-two countries. Aug. 12-28. For full festival schedule, visit www.fringenyc.org. (212-279-4488.)

OEDIPUS AT PALM SPRINGS
Leigh Silverman directs the Five Lesbian Brothers in their first new production in eight years—a satirical revisiting of Greek tragedy, set in modern times. Opens Aug. 3 at 7. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY
"Star Wars," "The Empire Strikes Back," and "The Return of the Jedi" are recapped in a single hour by Charles Ross in his sui-generis show, directed by TJ Dawe. In previews. Opens Aug. 9 at 8. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA
The Public Theatre's second Shakespeare in the Park production is a revival of John Guare and Mel Shapiro's 1971 musical adaptation, with a score by Galt MacDermot ("Hair"). Kathleen Marshall directs. Previews begin Aug. 16. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
The multidisciplinary festival at HERE Arts Center includes dozens of new works of theatre, dance, video, and less classifiable genres. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. Through Aug. 21.)

THE CONSTANT WIFE
A splendid revival by the Roundabout Theatre Company of W. Somerset Maugham's 1926 drawing-room comedy. Lynn Redgrave shines as the right and very honorable Mrs. Culver, a woman who is not afraid to speak her mind and who does so with élan. Kate Burton plays her daughter Constance, whose doctor husband of fifteen years (Michael Cumpsty) is having an affair with Marie-Louise (Kathryn Meisle)—Constance's best friend. "The Constant Wife" is Oscar Wilde lite, but no matter. Everything about this production is such a pleasure—from Allen Moyer's set design and Michael Krass's costumes to Mark Brokaw's impeccable direction—that the hackneyed plot and loopy logic barely register. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/27/05.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Aug. 21.)

DRUMSTRUCK
Catharsis comes in many forms, but on a hot summer evening there's nothing quite like banging on a *djembe*, keeping time with an ensemble of master African drummers and dancers. In this show from Johannesburg, each audience member is provided with a two-foot-tall drum, which the spirited performers demonstrate how to use to exhilarating effect. Highlights of the evening include a percussive dance from the Gauteng gold mines and the song "Jikele Maweni," a full-throated ballad made famous by Miriam Makeba. David Warren directs. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

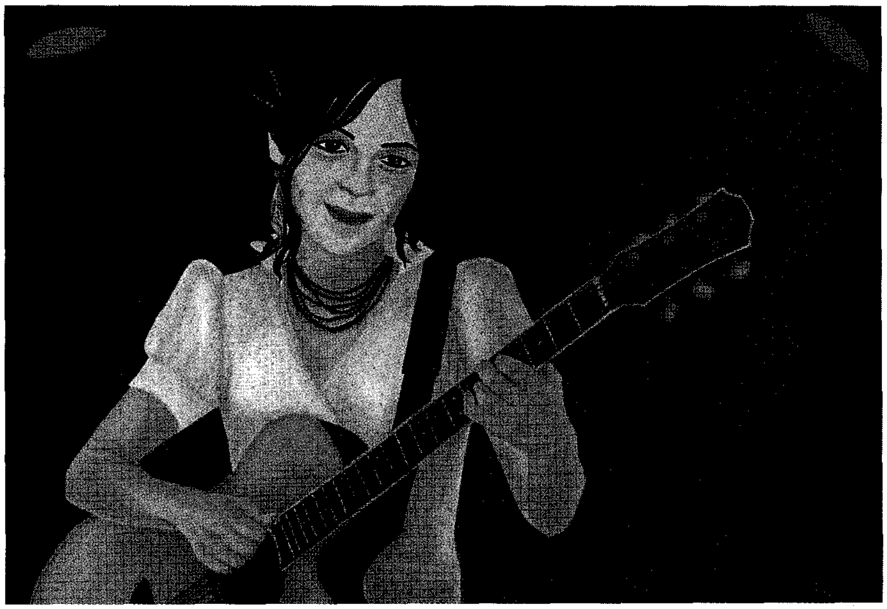
FATAL ATTRACTION: A GREEK TRAGEDY
A hammy retelling of the 1987 film, complete with bad perms, a boiled bunny who rises from the grave for a dance break, and a portentous Greek chorus. Corey Feldman makes his stage début in the Michael Douglas role, while Alana McNair and Kate Wilkinson, who adapted the show from the original, stand in for Glenn Close and Anne Archer. Much of the comedy hinges on the debatable view that the movie demonizes businesswomen, and at times the satire wears thin. But Feldman carries the show with his gruff, gung-ho impersonation. Timothy Haskell ("I Love Paris") directs. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Through Aug. 27.)

ICE FACTORY '05
Two plays close the Soho Think Tank's festival of new work. "Major Bang," a convoluted comedy about a boy who builds a nuclear reactor in his back yard, is presented by the Obie-winning Foundry Theatre, and runs Aug. 3-6 at 7. And the Witness Relocation Company performs a gory update of Racine's "Andromaque," set to David Bowie songs and titled "In a Hall in the Palace of Pyrrhus," Aug. 10-13 at 7. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

MIDTOWN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
The summer series presents more than fifty shows at five venues, including a musical about Gen-X apathy, a comedy about a moth infestation, and a drama about artists in Hell's Kitchen. For full festival schedule, visit www.midtownfestival.org. (212-868-4444. Through Aug. 7.)

PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!
At the Irish Repertory Theatre, an excellent cast revives Brian Friel's bittersweet 1964 play about Gar O'Donnell, a young Irishman who resolves to leave his home town of Ballybeg—a place where time changes nothing, particularly the ties between father and son—and travel to Philadelphia. As he ponders parting from the lads he knocked around with and the girl he loved, he splits into two characters: the clever, cynical Private Gar (superbly played by James Kennedy) and his boyish alter ego, Public Gar (Michael FitzGerald). A nuanced production, sensitively directed by Ciarán O'Reilly. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

PRIMO
Antony Sher plays the Italian chemist and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi in the New York run of London's National Theatre production of this biographical drama, which is based on Levi's experiences at Auschwitz. Of the London show, our critic John Lahr wrote, "Levi is a witness to the Holocaust, and, as Antony Sher expertly plays him, his presence has a quiet, commanding urgency." (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 14.)



Natalia Lafourcade, at the Latin Alternative Music Conference (see Night Life).

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
B. D. Wong leads the cast in a revival of "Pippin," the tongue-in-cheek 1972 musical that imagines the coming-of-age struggles of Charlemagne's son. Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by Roger O. Hirson. Jack Hofsiss ("The Elephant Man") directs. Previews begin Aug. 9. Opens Aug. 13 at 8. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

GOODSPEED MUSICALS
In 1954, Julie Andrews made her Broadway début in "The Boy Friend," Sandy Wilson's spoof of nineteen-twenties musical comedies, playing a giddy English heiress who falls for a delivery boy. Now she is directing a revival of the play, in Connecticut, which goes on national tour in the fall. (Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Conn. 860-873-8668.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"The Tempest" and "Two Gentlemen of Verona" play in rotating repertory on the tented outdoor stage at the Boscobel Restoration. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Cold Spring, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
Michael McKean, Aasif Mandvi, and Margaret Colin star in "On the Razzle," Tom Stoppard's play about two madcap store clerks, adapted from a nineteenth-century farce by Johann Nestroy. Directed by David Jones. Aug. 3-7 and Aug. 9-14. For full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

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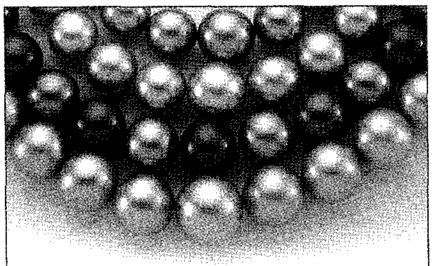

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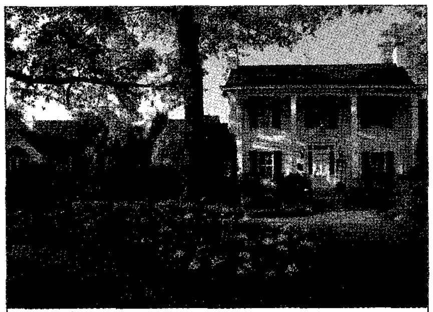

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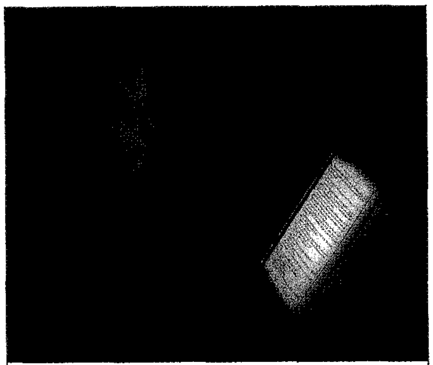

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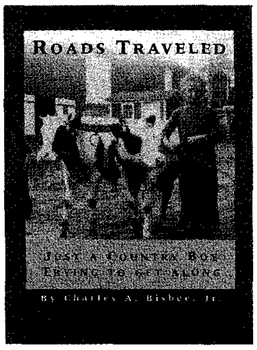

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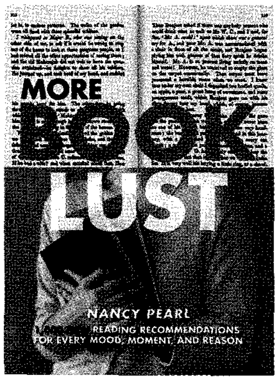

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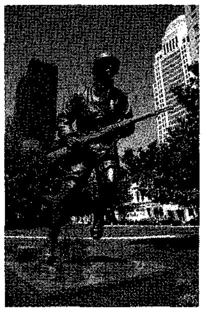

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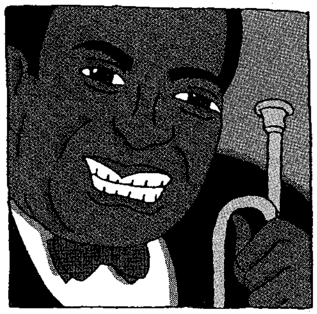
WAR HERO MEMORIALS

ABOUT TOWN
SATCHMO AT HOME

Dropping in on a neighbor isn't exactly a New York thing, but it's the sense that descends in happy force on a visitor to the Louis Armstrong House, at 34-56 107th Street, Corona, the cozy brick-faced home under dusty trees and the LaGuardia flight path where the greatest American musician lived for almost thirty years (he died there in 1971) with his fourth wife, Lucille, and their dogs, including a favorite Boston terrier, General. Docent tours emphasize Armstrong's training (he could sight-read in all twelve keys) and staggering fame (a 1956 concert in Ghana attracted a half million fans). The notion also comes that the shrine could just as easily have been called the Lucille Armstrong House. Fond of crystal chandeliers and gold-plated bathroom fixtures, she bought the place while he was on tour and converted it to Monticello, Queens, with tricky foldaway kitchen cabinets and wallpapered bureau drawers. Best art: a lush, toothy oil of the Master in Louis's den by a local painter, Benedetto, a.k.a. Tony Bennett. Best gift-shop prize: genuine packets of Armstrong's daily laxative, Swiss Kriss.



SEYMOUR CHWAST

—*Roger Angell*

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ALL SHOOK UP: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **ALTAR BOYZ:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BORDER/CLASH:** The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. (Through Aug. 7.) **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 28.) **LAZER VAUDEVILLE:** Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544. **MANUSCRIPT:** Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 21.) **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE PARIS LETTER:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. (Through Aug. 7.) **THE PILLOWMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE SKIN GAME:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. **SWEET CHARITY:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TALK OF THE TOWN:** Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. 212-840-6800. **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Sept. 4.) **TWELFTH NIGHT:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave., between 24th and 25th Sts. 212-279-4200. (Closes Aug. 21.) **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200. **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Sept. 4.) **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—In addition to a successful acting career on Broadway and in feature films, the hip-hop m.c. **Mos Def** is known for his smooth voice and witty verse. He's here Aug. 7, accompanied by the Brooklyn hardcore-rap duo **Smif-N-Wessun** and others. Aug. 9-10: **George Thorogood** drinks alone. Aug. 11: **Jefferson Starship** celebrates the fortieth anniversary of its predecessor, the rock ensemble Jefferson Airplane. The original members Paul Kantner and Marty Balin will be piloting, along with David Frieberg (of Quicksilver Messenger Service), Tom Constanten (of the Grateful Dead), and other veterans of the hazy San Francisco scene. Aug. 13: The m.c.s **Method Man** and **Street Life**, two artists associated with the Wu-Tang Clan. Method Man, arguably the biggest star to emerge from the Staten Island conglomerate, is a household name; Street Life, who first appeared during the "Killa Beez" era, has yet to achieve major success. His new album is "Street Education." Aug. 14: The underground hip-hop collective the **Hieroglyphics,** led by Del the Funky Homosapien, traffics in quirky rhymes and innovative, danceable cadences.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—Aug. 4: The singer-songwriter **Colin Hay,** formerly of Men at Work.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—Aug. 4: **Ben Folds,** the erstwhile leader of the guitarless alt-rock trio Ben Folds Five, teams up with the theatrical crooner **Rufus Wainwright** and the Australian acoustic popster **Ben Lee** in a benefit show for the series. Aug. 5: **Plastilina Mosh** (see the Latin Alternative Music Conference).

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 5: Two of the most acclaimed jazz pianists of their generation, **Brad Mehldau** and **Jason Moran** (here with his trio, Bandwagon), are joined by another accomplished keyboard stylist, the Wynton Marsalis alumnus **Eric Lewis.** Aug. 7: The celebrated London-based electronica artist **M.I.A.,** with **Diplo** (see the Knitting Factory) and others. Aug. 13: The gospel diva **Yolanda Adams,** who has helped popularize Christian music by infusing it with smooth R. & B. and up-tempo funk. Aug. 14: The heavyweight singer **Barrington Levy** helped create the dancehall-reggae sound in the late seventies through his recordings with the group Roots Radics and the producer Henry (Junjo) Laws. His plaintive voice made smash hits out of numerous songs, including the early favorite "Shine Eye Gal" and the ganja anthem "Under Mi Sensi." With the **Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra,** famous for bizarre cover versions and frenetic performances.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 9: **Paul Anka** plays his first New York club show in thirty years. While Rod Stewart and other aging pop stars have renewed their careers by covering the Great American Songbook, Anka has reversed the trend—his latest album, "Rock Swings," gives big-band treatment to hits by the likes of Bon Jovi, Oasis, Nirvana, and Michael Jackson. Aug. 11: The **Knitters** date back to the dawn of the Reagan Administration. A country-and-rockabilly side project of the Los Angeles bands the Blasters and X, the group has released only two albums; the new one, "The Modern Sounds of the Knitters," finds John Doe, Exene Cervenka, D. J. Bonebrake, Dave Alvin, and Johnny Ray Bartel picking up right where they left off.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Aug. 8: The husband-and-wife duo **Amadou & Mariam,** blind musicians who hail from Mali and live in Paris, make a rare visit to New York. The pair's latest album, "Dimanche à Bamako," was produced by the sonic innovator Manu Chao.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—**Scout Niblett's** high, keening voice and slightly mournful songs draw immediate comparisons to the shy singer Cat Power; Niblett is here Aug. 5 with songs from her latest album, "Kidnapped by Neptune." Aug. 13: **Kano,** one of the young stars of East London's raging grime scene, teams up with the American d.j. **Diplo** for a night of rapid-fire rhymes and dancehall, deep bass, and Brazilian break beats.

LATIN ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE
Rock, rap, funk, folk, metal, and electronica coexist comfortably during this music festival–cum–industry summit. Insiders will attend the panel discussions, but music fans and dancers will want to catch the shows. Highlights include the groovy Venezuelan band **Los Amigos Invisibles,** outdoors in the courtyard of the Museo del Barrio (Fifth Ave. at 104th St., 212-831-7272, Aug. 4), the Mexican pop sensation **Natalia y La Forquetina** (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St., 212-533-2111, Aug. 4), the funky sophomoric duo **Plastilina Mosh** (Celebrate Brooklyn!, Aug. 5), and a triple bill featuring Colombia's **Aterciopelados,** the punk prog-rockers **Coheed & Cambria,** and the Spanish vocalist **Bebe** (Central Park SummerStage, Aug. 6). (For more information about the conference, visit www.latinalternative.com.)

"P.S. 1 WARM UP"
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—This outdoor dance party, which takes place every Saturday through Sept. 3, features the legendary hip-hop d.j./m.c. **Lovebug Starski** on Aug. 13. In the late seventies, Starski shared d.j. duties with Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five and DJ Hollywood at the South Bronx club Disco Fever. Though Starski did not achieve the fame of his former colleagues, some credit him with inventing the term "hip-hop." He's here with the d.j. **Jason Blackkat,** a longtime member of the underground hardcore-techno scene.

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SOUTH STREET SEAPORT
19 Fulton St.—Aug. 10: Two up-and-coming new bands, the Denver-based and Gypsy-tinged **DeVotchKa** and the local ensemble **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah!**, play a free show as part of the Seaport Music Festival.
THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Aug 3: The Mr. Bungle guitarist **Trey Spruance** and members of his band Secret Chiefs 3 perform a mix of ersatz Persian melodies, odd meters, and California rock.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 2-7: The seventies jazz trumpeter **Charles Tolliver,** returned from decades of obscurity, appears at the helm of a big band whose revolving ranks are stocked with both vital veterans and young players. Aug. 9-14: Expert hard bop from the celebrated pianist **Cedar Walton,** who is joined by the trombonist **Steve Turre,** the saxophonist **Vincent Herring,** and the drummer **Lewis Nash.**
IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 4-7: The **Archie Shepp/Roswell Rudd Band.** The interaction between the saxophonist Shepp and the trombonist Rudd isn't quite as volatile as it was during the free-jazz heyday of the mid-sixties, but there is still more than enough bluster and grit to remind us of what we've been missing. Aug. 11-14: The saxophonist **David (Fathead) Newman** pays tribute to Ray Charles. Thanks to the bio-pic "Ray," Newman, who was a member of Charles's band from 1954 to 1964, has attained a kind of celebrity status. He's one of the architects of R. & B., as well as a jazz player with a pronounced classical streak. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.
JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—The Festival of New Trumpet Music spotlights musicians who have made their reputations by studiously avoiding the tried and true. Among the masters are **Bill Dixon** (Aug. 2), **Dave Douglas** (Aug. 4), **Bobby Bradford** (Aug. 5), **Steven Bernstein** (Aug. 6), and **Randy Sandke** (Aug. 7). Aug. 10-14: The saxophonist **Lee Konitz,** one of the premier improvisers of our time, fronts a nonet. The shows will be recorded for an upcoming album.
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—Aug. 7: **Greg Osby's Sound Theatre** features the bold saxophonist, along with the guitarist **Liberty Ellman** and the pianist **Megumi Yonezawa.**
VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 2-7: The **Bill McHenry** quartet. McHenry, a major tenor saxophonist who's on the young side, is unafraid to let his gorgeous sound fill the room. He'll get inspiration here from the legendary drummer **Paul Motian.** Aug. 9-14: The **Al Foster** quartet. Foster, an esteemed drummer, has brought rhythmic sparkle to the bands of Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Joe Henderson, among many others. Here he's joined by the Israeli saxophonist **Eli Digibri,** the pianist **Kevin Hays,** and the bassist **Doug Weiss.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Chanel,"** a retrospective of designs from the couture house. Through Aug. 7. ♦ **"Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles,"** a revelatory, achingly beautiful show, pairs items from the artist's personal fabric collection with paintings and graphic works in which they played crucial roles. Through Sept. 25. ♦ Two recent installations are on view in **"Tony Oursler at the Met: 'Studio' and 'Climaxed.' "** The first contemplates influences on the artist through an assemblage of pieces by the likes of Jacqueline Humphries, Rem Koolhaas, and Kaare Rafoss. The second, more traditional Oursler work is a giant, lumpy potato head with flames and a blinky face projected on it, its mouth voicing demented and hilarious threats, boasts, and sorrows. Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker"** presents a few dozen pieces by a prominent Colonial American furniture-maker alongside work by his contemporaries. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** A summer installation in the roof garden, featuring five spiky stalagmite sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro, 1865-1885"** chronicles the careers of two friends who gave each other a leg up into brave new styles and techniques, though it quickly becomes clear that Cézanne, the younger artist by a decade, vaulted much higher. Through Sept. 12. ♦ **"Friedlander,"** a major retrospective of the work of the photographer Lee Friedlander (born in 1934). Through Aug. 29. ♦ **"The High Line"** details Field Operations and Diller Scofidio & Renfro's ambitious urban rails-to-trails scheme for the abandoned elevated tracks that run along the West Side from Gansevoort Street to Thirty-fourth Street. Through Oct. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Oteiza: Myth and Modernism."** The Basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza (1908-2003) followed in the high-modernist footsteps of Giacometti and Henry Moore. This small but expansive exhibition presents a thoughtful and inventive abstractionist, whose carved blocks of marble and folded planes of steel realize the aleatory, speculative geometries of his construction-paper collages. Through Aug. 24. ♦ **"Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition: Photographs and Mannerist Prints."** An exhibition that harmonizes Mapplethorpe's classically posed, erotically charged photographs with stylized sixteenth-century Flemish Mannerist prints. Through Aug. 24. ♦ **"Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Robert Smithson,"** a retrospective of drawings, constructions, and collages, includes filmed, photographed, and sketched documentation of the iconic "Spiral Jetty." Through Oct. 23. ♦ Work by eight artists, including Terry Winters, Ati Maier, and Matthew Ritchie, is on display in **"Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Painting and Drawing."** Through Oct. 9. ♦ The eclectic gathering of works from the permanent collection in **"Landscape"** ranges from Jasper Johns's white maps to Ed Ruscha's rows of L.A. streets and Roni Horn's eerie comparison of the body and the earth, "Becoming a Landscape" (1999-2001). Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"Banks Violette: Untitled"** contemplates the romantic sublime with a model of a ruined church cast in salt and music composed by the black-metal musician Snorre Ruch. Through Oct. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)
WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Past Presence: Childhood and Memory"** is a slight but intriguing show about childish urges and experiences. Charles LeDray addresses the compulsion to collect, with a case of two thousand tiny, pure-white porcelain vessels, too small to be anything but toys or art. A pair of Gary Simmons pieces mimic chalkboards, echoing both Cy Twombly and his own recent smudged word paintings. Robert Beck's charcoal drawings on paper use appropriated images from a book on manly skills (one demonstrates how to skin a bunny) to evoke a boy's simultaneous attraction and resistance to growing up. And Peggy Preheim's small graphite drawings—of children, dogs, leaves, a lizard held in a hand—form a disjointed narrative, like snapshots or brief memory flashes of the world at its most marvellous. Through Oct. 13. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)
BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Monet's London: Artists' Reflections on the Thames, 1859-1914"** includes Claude Monet's signature melting views of the Waterloo and Charing Cross Bridges, Whistler's "Thames Set" etchings (1859-60), and works by Winslow Homer, Childe Hassam, and André Derain, among others. Through

TABLES FOR TWO

A

947 Columbus Ave. (212-531-1643)—A is just above 106th Street, in a neighborhood whose trendier residents have taken to calling it SoHa (south of Harlem). Although the restaurant's name is derived from the A train—its logo is painted on a circular front window—the closest stop is several blocks away. Perhaps this is a ploy to keep people from finding the place, which tries to feed twenty-four in a mere two hundred square feet and is consequently always full. The kitchen is separated from the diners by a shower curtain, and the menu of French-Caribbean food is prepared with one burner and two convection ovens.

A's size determines almost everything about it, and the owners—Marc Solomon and his wife, Blue Grant—have thought creatively about what can be achieved in such quarters. A bring-your-own-bottle policy eliminates the need for wine storage, and the menu is minimal—usually about five appetizers, five entrées, and two desserts. The reliable delights of melted cheese are well represented in appetizers such as a hollowed-out Fuji apple filled with a Camembert fondue and finished with cinnamon, and a quail terrine with a Brie crust. The entrées taste more French than Caribbean—duck magret with guava was very like duck à l'orange, and none the worse for that—and although the cuisine ostensibly comes from the islands, until recently there were no seafood dishes. Vegetarian options are available, and they are inventively done, like everything else; on a sweltering July day, the chef replaced his usual coconut cassoulet with a chilled cucumber soup.

Inevitably, there are some compromises. The crème brûlée is made in advance—to wield a blowtorch here would be to risk singeing a guest's hair—and so lacks crunch, and on a recent evening the restaurant had simply run out of coffee. But no one minded. Four and a half years old, A has a besotted SoHa following, and is so endearingly tiny that it's impossible not to root for it. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $11-$13.)

—Leo Carey

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"A Lifeguard's Dream" (1972), from a show of photographs taken in the nineteen-seventies by Joseph Szabo, at Gitterman.

Sept. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"War/Hell: Master Prints by Otto Dix and Max Beckmann."** Beckmann's images of the Weimar Republic are like Cubist collages, crowded with figures and depicting horrors such as Rosa Luxemburg's assassination and torturers at work. A group identified as "The Ideologists" stand with their eyes turned piously up and their mouths open to speak; the family in "Hunger" says grace over a meal of sardines. Where Beckmann presents types and allegories, Dix's series of fifty etchings, based on four years spent in the trenches, depict the First World War with frightening documentary, Expressionist gore: skeletons are clad in uniforms, with helmets and gas masks; soldiers on leave consort with prostitutes or weave tipsily through city streets, and one undergoes a gruesome skin graft. The parallels to Goya's "Disasters of War," as well as to contemporary news images, are obvious. Through Sept. 26. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Temporarily situated in the Chelsea Art Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—In the 1933 novel "Lost Horizon," James Hilton imagined the mythical Shangri-La, a mountain paradise visited by a marooned British diplomat; six decades later, a dozen towns near China's Tibetan border were vying for the right to use the name to attract tourists. **Patty Chang's** video documents a visit to the town that won the "Shangri-La War," alternating scraps of mundane workaday life with more magical scenes. To plump up the latter category, Chang hired locals to build a mirrored replica of nearby mountains. The result rests, like a relic from an odd dream, in the back of a pickup truck parked in an adjacent gallery. Through Sept. 10. ♦ Aernout Mik's video installation **"Refraction"** captures the movements of emergency workers and gawkers at a staged bus crash. The deflating sense of urgency—there are no victims—translates into something that feels more flat than frantic or compelling. Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Rhizome Artbase 101."** Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York 2005"** features work by more than a hundred and sixty artists from around the city who have emerged in the past five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

PETER WEGNER

Wegner has tucked an urban version of the hedgerow labyrinth inside the lobby of Lever House: a maze of stacked paper in deep greens and blues. The saturated colors evoke a cool, shady natural world, while the uneven tiers, ranging from hip level to eye level, suggest city blocks. The installation is just big enough to disorient, but it's still a soothing, air-conditioned oasis in sweltering midtown. While here, you can also take in Damien Hirst's thirty-four-foot-tall, partially flayed "Virgin Mother" (2005) in the courtyard. Through Sept. 4. (390 Park Ave., at 53rd St.)

Short List

JANET CARDIFF: Starts at the kiosk on Central Park South at Sixth Avenue; a credit card or photo I.D. is required to take out the audio equipment. Thursdays through Sundays, 10 to 3:30. For more information or for reservations, call the Public Art Fund, at 212-980-3942. Through Sept. 11. **ERLE LORAN:** Smithsonian Archives of American Art Research Center, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-399-5015. Through Oct. 7. **JOSEPH SZABO:** Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Through Aug. 6. **"GIRLS ON FILM":** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Sept. 2.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

GEERT GOIRIS

This Belgian photographer describes his work as "traumatic realism . . . a short transitory glimpse of another reality." The color photographs in his impressive New York début are, accordingly, straightforward and digitally unmanipulated but strange: a tumbledown heap of red plastic highway barriers, an albino wallaby on a lawn at dusk, a sink full of frozen water that appears to erupt in a miniature phallic waterspout. Landscape and architecture are the primary concerns, but Goiris is nothing if not versatile, and his picture of a bright midair explosion (or otherworldly visitation?) in a forest clearing is easily one of the most exciting images in town. Through Aug. 23. (Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700.)

SOL LEWITT

LeWitt is a steady presence this summer, with sculptures on the roof of the Met and in Madison Square Park as well as two new wall drawings at Pace. They're best described as minimalist maximalism: simple in form but monumental in scale, and difficult to execute. Fifteen assistants labored two and a half weeks, working only with pencils, to create the drawings, one sixteen feet high by thirty-four feet wide and the other sixteen by twenty-seven. Strip away the Mt. Rushmore statistics and they

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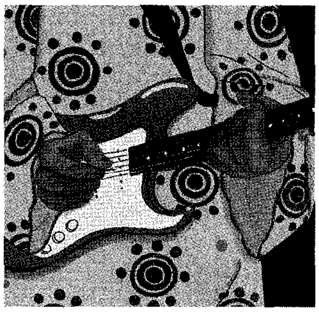
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE AFRICAN BLUES

In 1975, the guitarist Amadou Bagayoko and the singer Mariam Doumbia met at the Institute for the Young Blind, in Bamako, Mali. He was twenty, and she was seventeen; the two were married in 1980 and toured in various bands together. In the late nineties, the couple began releasing albums that owed a debt to the incantatory blues of the Malian legend Ali Farka Touré, while incorporating bits of soul and reggae. The albums reached the Spanish-French pop star Manu Chao, who produced their new record, "Dimanche à Bamako," which went gold in France and won the equivalent of a Grammy. "Dimanche" has been called the next "Buena Vista Social Club," but even if the album never makes it to Starbucks it's still a felicitous combination of warm vocals, Chao's reggae beat, and a subtle political sensibility. "Camions Sauvages" ("Wild Tracks"), co-written with Chao, neatly sums up the downside of power: "You, the driver of this bad truck / Can't you brake a little?/ Your bad car kills giraffes, / Hippopotamuses, and children." Amadou & Mariam appear August 8 at Joe's Pub.



—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

look like dark and light vortices, or the residue from giant exhaust pipes. One moves from dark to light at the center; the other from light to dark. It's all very straightforward, but the cumulative effect verges on the sublime. Through Aug. 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

BILL OWENS
Owens, who is best known for his 1973 book "Suburbia," is easy to shrug off as a clever, anecdotal photographer in the tradition of Elliot Erwitt. But this excellent survey of work mostly from the seventies emphasizes Owens's sharper edge and restores the bite to his satirical view of the American Dream, California-subdivision style. Opening with a wall of gun-toting children and adults, the show touches down at Altamont (where Hell's Angels are beating someone to the ground before a horrified crowd), a women's bathroom (where a girl leans toward a mirror, coke spoon poised), a busy hot tub, a prom, a strip club, and various grill-friendly back yards. Banal may not be beautiful, but it ages well. Through Sept. 24. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

"BRIDGE FREEZES BEFORE ROAD"
Work by a few women—Andrea Zittel, Lali Chetwynd, and Anne Collier—seems almost off topic among testosterone-injected paintings by artists like Martin Kippenberger, Erik Schmidt, and Kelley Walker. Aaron Young offers a video of a camera being kicked through a garden. Slater Bradley contributes a video of a scrawny boy pounding on drums while the Cal State football team works out in the background. Artistic innovation is mostly framed as a process of violent, heavy lifting, definitely not for sissies. Through Aug. 19. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

"MINETS À POLIS"
"School of Minneapolis" doesn't have quite the ring of "School of Paris" or "New York School," but the six artists in this show (all born or based there) argue for a solid Land of Ten Thousand Lakes aesthetic. Alec Soth's portrait of a woman and child at a Kmart with a shopping cart full of houseplants celebrates life in the great American exurbs, as do Todd Norsten's paintings of glaring pumpkins and a cozy little house. Rob Fischer, the gallery's artist of the moment, makes scruffy minimalist sculpture that attempts to do for Minnesota what Smithson did, in art lore, for Passaic, New Jersey. Through Aug. 19. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave. 212-206-8710.)

"WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION . . ."
If the title of this show is misleading, its subhead—"Autobiographical Photography and the Snapshot Aesthetic"—clarifies things. Larry Clark's early Tulsa work sets the tone: casually erotic and rigorously unsentimental, but, on a scale from hot to cool, quite warm. Nan Goldin, Richard Billingham, Jack Pierson, Michael Meads, Walter Pfeiffer, and Michael Schmelling all look fine here, but Ryan McGinley practically steals the show with an ecstatic shot of a blond boy swooning in the sun-splashed woods, and Wolfgang Tillmans contributes a lovely still-life of fruit and magazines on a windowsill, which suits the season perfectly. Through Aug. 19. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

GABRIELA FRIDRIKSDÓTTIR / DANIEL HESIDENCE / WILL RYMAN
Is Icelandic art inherently oddball? Or have its young practitioners just fallen into habits set by their predecessors? The question arises at a video installation by Fridriksdóttir (who represents her nation at the current Venice Biennale) in which the artist, nude, licks and sucks a chocolaty brown substance with unsettling zeal. The paint-scabbed images of severed heads by Hesidence, a New Yorker, provide an apt counterpoint, but Ryman (the son of the painter Robert Ryman) has a harder time standing up to such inventive weirdness—his folksy-craftsy sculptural figures and tableaux of mundane objects are more art-school experimental than cannily strange. Through Aug. 5. (Williams, 313 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757.)

DANCE

PILOBOLUS
Three programs alternate in the final week of the company's season at the Joyce: "Suspended," in which the dancers dangle from harnesses and silks and fly through the air; "Aquatic," an undersea spectacle; and the rocking "Megawatt > Full Strength." For complete schedule, see www.joyce.org. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 1-5 at 8 and Aug. 6 at 2 and 8.)

HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
Long known for its all-American jazz numbers, the company has recently drawn more of its repertory from across the Atlantic, broadening its stylistic range at the cost of some of its distinctiveness. That trend continues in the troupe's two programs at the Joyce, with Ohad Naharin's "Tabula Rasa" and Nacho Duato's "Gnawa" (a New York première). The season also features a world première by the group's artistic director, Jim Vincent: "Uniformity" has three sections, choreographed to Vivaldi, David Lang, and rhythm and blues. More in the old mode are Daniel Ezralow's "SF/LB," set to Leonard Bernstein's "Prelude, Fugues, and Riffs," and the New York première of Lar Lubovitch's "Love Stories," which applies stock lyricism to standards made fresh by the Chicago jazz singer Kurt Elling. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 8-12 at 8, Aug. 13 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 15-16 at 8. Through Aug. 20.)

"PLAY PLAY FASTER FASTER"
Aaron Rosenblum, Sara Juli, John Wyszniewski, Jake Hooker, Jessica Barbagallo, and other lights of the downtown dance and theatre scenes present a series of solos, trios, and ensemble pieces about the conflict between animal instincts and civilizing impulses in human nature. A Big Dance Theatre presentation. (The Dumbo Stable, 16 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. Aug. 4-5 at 8.)

SMUIN BALLET
The San Francisco-based troupe offers both its nostalgic "Dancin' with Gershwin" (from 2003) and the New York première of its latest Broadway-style revue, "Fly Me to the Moon." In this work, the Tony winner Michael Smuin's straight-ahead treatment of the Sinatra hit parade reaches right for the snap-brim hat and the crescent-moon backdrop, planting a flourish on every big-band cymbal clash. The classically trained dancers perform light, effortless-seeming leaps and lifts, adding considerably to the over-all mood of swellness. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Square S. 212-992-8484. Aug. 9 and Aug. 11-12 at 8, and Aug. 13 at 2 and 8.)

CHRIS ELAM / MISNOMER DANCE THEATRE
The unexpected angles and abrupt movements of Elam's choreography play out on a Battery Park lawn at lunchtime in his new piece, "Several Stories," part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Sitelines" series. In the first part, a hail of birdseed draws pigeons from the sky, prompting five dancers in bird headdresses to spring into action. Wearing halter tops and short shorts, they strut across the grass like half-avian club kids, chests thrust forward, tails up, moving to a sound collage by Rob Erickson. In the second part, a couple performs a clinging, manic duet, wrestling, waltzing, and hoisting each other off the ground. (Week 1: Battery Park, opposite the National Museum of the American Indian. Aug. 1-2 and Aug. 5-7 at 12:30 and 1:30. Week 2: Robert Wagner Park, off Battery Pl. Aug. 9 at 12:30 and 1:30, and Aug. 11 at 5:30 and 6:30. No tickets necessary.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
Four groups perform at the Pillow during the next two weeks. In the Ted Shawn Theatre, Stockholm/59° North, an ensemble made up of soloists and principals from the Royal Swedish Ballet, apply their solid classical training to contemporary work. The repertory here—by Mats Ek, Jorma Elo, Örjan Andersson, and Virpi Pahkinen—generally

LARA TOMLIN

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conforms, in its ice-crystal sharpness, to what one might expect from a Nordic troupe. Kenneth Kvarnström's flamenco farce, "Carmen?!," is the exception. (Aug. 3-5 at 8, Aug. 6 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 7 at 2.) In the Doris Duke Studio Theatre, Susan Marshall & Company presents the world première of "Cloudless," a kind of oblique short-story collection with five narrative sections. Filling out the program are "Other Stories" and "Kiss," Marshall's famous 1987 duet in which lovers swing, Peter Pan style, in harnesses. (Aug. 4-5 at 8:15, Aug. 6 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 7 at 5.) The following week, in the Ted Shawn space, the eager-to-please Aspen Santa Fe Ballet presents two works by Twyla Tharp: the classic "Sinatra Suite" and "Sweet Fields," an austerely tender tribute to her Quaker roots. Also on the program are Nicolo Fonte's "Left Unsaid" and Thierry Malandain's version of "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune." (Aug. 10-12 at 8, Aug. 13 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 14 at 2.) At the Doris Duke, the Trey McIntyre Project—the prolific young dancemaker's brand-new troupe—makes its East Coast début. The ten dancers present "Go Out," McIntyre's newest piece, which plays with the bluegrass music of Ralph Stanley; "High Lonesome," which channels the hip angst of songs by Beck; and "The Reassuring Effects (of Form and Poetry)," set to Dvořák's "Serenade for Strings." (Aug. 11-12 at 8:15, Aug. 13 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 14 at 5.) (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA

Vincent La Selva, a veteran conductor with a natural command of Italianate style, continues his thirty-two-year tradition of free opera in Central Park, leading his feisty company in a staged production of Puccini's **"Turandot,"** with Luciana LaMonico, Maria Knapik, and Christopher Jackson in the leading roles. (Naumburg Band Shell, enter at 72nd St. Aug. 3 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL

Aug. 5-6 at 8: The pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, the flutist James Galway, and the harpist Catrin Finch join Louis Langrée, the festival's music director, and the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra in works by Mozart (the Concerto for Flute and Harp and the Symphony No. 31, "Paris") and Ravel (the "Mother Goose" Suite and the Piano Concerto in G Major), one of a number of concerts emphasizing Mozart's links to the great cities of Europe. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 5 at 10:30: Thibaudet repairs to the Kaplan Penthouse to perform an intimate recital of solo works by Debussy, Ravel, and Satie. ♦ Aug. 7 at 3: Emmanuelle Haïm, continuing the Parisian theme, conducts her period orchestra Le Concert d'Astrée in music by Rameau (suites from the operas "Hippolyte et Aricie" and "Les Indes Galantes") and Handel. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 9-10 at 8: Tomas Hanus conducts the festival orchestra in the Symphony No. 38, "Prague," the concert aria "Bella mia fiamma" (with the soprano Mireille Delunsch), and the Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major (with Louis Lortie). (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 11 at 8: The acclaimed Gabrieli Consort and Players arrive from London, with Paul McCreesh conducting and with the soprano Sally Matthews and the fortepianist Ronald Brautigam making their festival débuts in a program featuring Mozart's Symphonies Nos. 1 (K. 16, composed in England) and 40 (K. 550), along with songs by the composer's London colleagues Linley, Storace, and J. C. Bach. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ Aug. 14 at 5: In the first of two concerts, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra explores Mozart's profound connection to the music of Italy, mixing music by Hasse and Sammartini with several early Mozart compositions, including the rarely performed Symphony No. 47 and arias from "Mitridate" and "Lucio Silla" (with the soprano Sandrine Piau). (Alice Tully Hall.) (212-721-6500. For full schedule of evening and late-night concerts and pre-concert recitals, see www.lincolncenter.org.)

CLASSICAL NOTES

GONE FISHIN'

As a fan once said, "We always return to Schubert." The music's tuneful appeal and its miraculous balance of Romantic melancholy and Classical discipline never wear thin. These days, we seem to be returning to Schubert with a vengeance, as a new generation finds ways to lighten the rich and weighty postwar style of such icons as Rudolf Serkin and David Oistrakh while preserving the music's expressive power.

Two recent recordings of the "Trout" Quintet reveal sharply different ideas. Virgin's new release, with a young crew of mostly French musicians, is a fleet and beautifully proportioned performance, notable for the delicate, pearly timbre of the pianist Frank Braley and the pinpoint intonation of the violinist Renaud Capuçon. The players' exquisite attention to detail results in a number of ravishing moments (the poetry with which they render the sad, still center of the Andante would be hard to surpass), but their restrained approach dulls during the famous fourth movement, a quirky set of variations on the Schubert song "Die Forelle," which gives the piece its nickname.

If the Frenchmen's Schubert is a master worthy of reverence, then the Schubert of EMI's new album, featuring the pianist Thomas Adès and members of the Belcea Quartet, is a young composer still clamoring to be heard. The forms are dynamic and unpredictable, the fast movements go like the wind, and the intense Belcea string players, with their grainy tone colors, dig into every line for meaning. It's no surprise that Adès, one of the world's major modernist composers, gives the piano part a strikingly independent profile, but it's even more gratifying to hear him play his own Piano Quintet at the top of the album. In twenty minutes, Adès reinvents Classical sonata form, developing wistful melodies reminiscent of Schubert and Berg into a structure girded by the rhythmic complexity of Ferneyhough and the iron logic of Ligeti. The Arditti Quartet, fearless explorers of the new and strange, are with him all the way.

—Russell Platt

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD

Some highlights from two weeks at the country's leading music festival. Aug. 3 at 8:30: In what should be a fascinating fire-and-ice combination, the exuberant Australian Chamber Orchestra makes its Tanglewood début with the Canadian pianist Angela Hewitt, known for the incisive probity of her Bach interpretations. They perform the composer's Keyboard Concertos in D Minor and F Minor in a concert that concludes with an arrangement of Ravel's String Quartet by the group's director, Richard Tognetti. ♦ Aug. 5 at 8:30: Matthias Goerne lends his dark and concentrated baritone to several songs from Mahler's "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" collection, beginning a program that continues with Carter's "Adagio Tenebroso" and Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite; Ingo Metzmacher conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra. ♦ Aug. 6 at 8:30: Neville Marriner conducts the B.S.O. in an all-Mozart evening that includes performances of the Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major (with Jonathan Biss), a pair of concert arias (with the soprano Veronique Gens), and the Symphony No. 39. ♦ Aug. 8 at 8:30: In the final concert of the prestigious Festival of Contemporary Music, Stefan Asbury conducts the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in Julian Philips's "Into Light," the world première of Lee Hyla's "The Triadic Coast," and Steven Stucky's Second Concerto for Orchestra, the winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Music. ♦ Aug. 11 at 8:30: The magnificent Leon Fleisher performs piano music by Bach, Schubert (the Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960), Sessions, Kirchner, and Perle. ♦ Aug. 12 at 8:30: Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos conducts the B.S.O. in a Cervantes evening: Falla's "Master Peter's Puppet Show" (with the Bob Brown Puppets) and Strauss's "Don Quixote" (with the cellist Truls Mørk). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8:30: The violinist Gil Shaham is the special guest for a B.S.O. concert of music by Mozart (the Violin Concerto No. 4) and Shostakovich (the Tenth Symphony); Andrew Davis conducts. ♦ Aug. 16 at 8:30: Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax perform most of Beethoven's music for cello and piano (including the Sonatas Nos. 1, 3, and 5). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. For full schedule, see www.bso.org.)

BARD SUMMERSCAPE

Aug. 4 and Aug. 10-11 at 8, Aug. 6-7 at 3, and Aug. 12 at 5: Only once in his career did Aaron Copland summon the energy to confront "*la forme fatale*," grand opera, and when he did it was on a theme as American as Kansas wheat. "The Tender Land," the story of a farm girl's rebellion against her family life, inspired by Walker Evans's Depression-era photographs, is offered with a cast of young singers, in Murry Sidlin's 1987 chamber-orchestra version; James Bagwell conducts. ♦ Aug. 12-14: In the first weekend of the Bard Music Festival, a distinguished group of musicians (including the mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson, the pianist Alan Feinberg, and Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra) begin their traversal of Copland's major works, along with music by such contemporaries as Gershwin, Thomson, and Ruth Crawford. For programs, visit www.summerscape.bard.edu. (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Aug. 4 and Aug. 13 at 8, Aug. 6 at 1:30, and Aug. 9 at 2: New York City Opera's sister company, more conservative than its dashing downstate relation, risks a bit of sin with Tazewell Thompson's staging of Britten's last opera, **"Death in Venice,"** with William Burden singing the role of Aschenbach and David Pittsinger as the Traveller; Stewart Robertson, the company's music director, conducts. ♦ Aug. 5 at 8 and Aug. 8, Aug. 14, and Aug. 16 at 2: Tim Albery's production of Mozart's **"Cosi Fan Tutte,"** with wonderful performances by Anne-Sophie Duprels, Sandra Piques Eddy, Camille Zamora, John Tessier, Palle Knudsen, and Sanford Sylvan; Robertson. ♦ Aug. 6 and Aug. 11 at 8, Aug. 13 at 1:30, and Aug. 15 at 2: Lillian Groag's production of Donizetti's **"Lucie de Lammermoor,"** the compact 1839 Paris version of "Lucia," boasts a worthy young cast, especially Sarah Coburn, Raúl Hernández, and Earle Patriarco in the leading roles; Beatrice Jona Affron conducts. ♦ Aug. 7 at 2 and Aug. 12 at 8: A double bill of Massenet's **"Le Portrait de Manon"** (with Theodore Baerg, Bruce Reed, Colin Ainsworth, and Kristine Winkler, conducted by Andrew Bisantz) and Poulenc's **"La Voix Humaine"** (a star turn for the soprano Amy Burton, conducted by Robertson). (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL

Aug. 5 at 8: The superb Shanghai Quartet, rounding out the festival's "Extreme Chamber Music" series, offers a group of contemporary works (including Chen Yi's "Fiddle Suite," with the *huqin* player Xu Ke), along with Ravel's String Quartet. ♦ Aug. 6 at 2: "Celebrating Sinatra" is the theme for the final weekend of the Caramoor Jazz Festival, a marathon concert (curated by Joe Lovano) that will feature, among others, the Bill Charlap Trio and the Luciana Souza Quartet. ♦ Aug. 11 at 7:30: In the first of two concerts, the Caramoor Virtuosi (including the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach) offer a courtly Boccherini string quintet, Schumann's impassioned Piano Quintet, and John Adams's first masterwork, the exhilarating septet "Shaker Loops," from 1978. ♦ Aug. 13 at 8: For the festival's grand finale, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the soprano Audra McDonald sings selections from "Porgy and Bess," and Lydia Kavina assists in Joseph Schillinger's "First Airphonic Suite for Theremin and Orchestra," a pioneering use of the space-age instrument; Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony holds its own in the second half. Michael Barrett conducts. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. For full schedule, see www.caramoor.org.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL
The legendary summer school and festival, devoted to deeply considered performances of the chamber-music repertory, offers its final concerts of the season. (Marlboro, Vt. 215-569-4690. Aug. 5-6 and Aug. 12-13 at 8:30 and Aug. 7 and Aug. 14 at 2:30. Programs are announced one week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The St. Petersburg String Quartet joins some friends to perform music by Brahms—the Viola Quintet in G Major and the String Sextet in B-Flat Major—in the first of two weekend concerts. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 6 at 8. For full schedule, see www.musicmountain.org.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 13 at 8: In the first of two gala concerts celebrating the series' ninetieth anniversary, Alexander Platt conducts members of the Manhattan new-music band Sequitur in Saint-Saëns's "Carnival of the Animals" and Walton's "Façade" (both with Peter Schickele and Susan Sindall narrating), as well as Constant Lambert's absorbing "Jazz Concerto for Piano and Nine Instruments" (with Scott Dunn). ♦ Aug. 14 at 3: The Tokyo String Quartet performs music by Stravinsky, Ravel, and Schubert (the Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden"). (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217. For full schedule, see www.maverickconcerts.org.)

MOVIES OPENING

ASYLUM
David Mackenzie directed this romantic thriller set in England, about a woman who falls in love with one of her husband's psychiatric patients. With Natasha Richardson, Ian McKellen, and Hugh Bonneville. Opening Aug. 12. (Union Square.)

BROKEN FLOWERS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 5. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

THE CENTURY OF THE SELF
A documentary about the rise of the "self," and Sigmund Freud's dynasty. Opening Aug. 12. (Cinema Village.)

DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE
Hubert Sauper's documentary about how foreign fishing companies destroyed the local economies surrounding Lake Victoria. In English, Russian, and Swahili. Opening Aug. 3. (IFC Center.)

DEUCE BIGALOW: EUROPEAN GIGOLO
In this comedy sequel, Rob Schneider plays a male prostitute who must save his good friend and former pimp (Eddie Griffin) from a murder rap. Directed by Mike Bigelow. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

THE DUKES OF HAZZARD
An adaptation of the seventies TV show, with Seann William Scott as Bo, Johnny Knoxville as Luke, Jessica Simpson as Daisy Duke, and Willie Nelson as Uncle Jesse. Directed by Jay Chandrasekhar. Opening Aug. 5. (In wide release.)

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Words on Music

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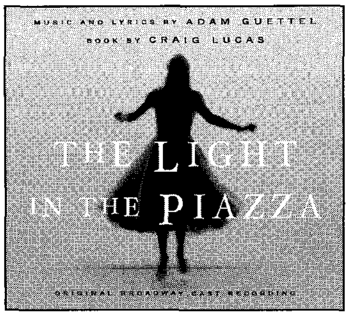
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FOUR BROTHERS
Four foster brothers (two black and two white) return to the Detroit home of the woman who reared them and try to solve her murder. Directed by John Singleton. With Mark Wahlberg, André Benjamin, and Terrence Howard. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

THE GOEBBELS EXPERIMENT
A documentary about the life of the Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels, directed by Lutz Hachmeister. In German, with English narration by Kenneth Branagh. (Quad Cinema.)

THE GREAT RAID
John Dahl directed this war film, about the Ranger battalion that liberated more than five hundred American P.O.W.s in the Philippines in 1945. With Benjamin Bratt and James Franco. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

GRIZZLY MAN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

JUNEBUG
In Phil Morrison's directorial début, an art dealer from Chicago meets her new husband's North Carolina family. With Embeth Davidtz, Alessandro Nivola, and Amy Adams. Opening Aug. 3. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MY DATE WITH DREW
A documentary about a young man who tries to make his dream of having a date with Drew Barrymore come true. Directed by Brian Herzlinger, Jon Gunn, and Brett Winn. Opening Aug. 5. (In wide release.)

PRETTY PERSUASION
A dark comedy about a Beverly Hills teen-ager (Evan Rachel Wood) who deceitfully accuses a teacher (Ron Livingston) of sexual harassment. With James Woods, Jane Krakowski, and Selma Blair. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

SAINT RALPH
Michael McGowan wrote and directed this drama, set in 1954, about a boy who tries to win the Boston Marathon to save his sick mother. With Adam Butcher and Campbell Scott. Opening Aug. 5. (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3 and Empire 25.)

SECUESTRO EXPRESS
A young upper-class Venezuelan couple are kidnapped and held for ransom, in a drama directed by Jonathan Jakubowicz. With Mía Maestro, Jean Paul Leroux, and Rubén Blades. In Spanish. Opening Aug. 5. (Empire 25.)

THE SKELETON KEY
Iain Softley directed this thriller, in which a nurse (Kate Hudson) is hired to take care of an elderly man (John Hurt) in his mansion on a Louisiana bayou. With Gena Rowlands and Peter Sarsgaard. Opening Aug. 12. (In wide release.)

A STATE OF MIND
Daniel Gordon's documentary focusses on two young gymnasts who have been selected to perform in North Korea's Mass Games, a spectacle dedicated to entertaining Kim Jong Il. In English and Korean. Opening Aug. 10. (Film Forum.)

2046
Wong Kar-wai's romantic epic follows one man's affairs with several women. With Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Ziyi Zhang, Gong Li, and Maggie Cheung. Opening Aug. 5. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY
In Tim Burton's adaptation of the book by Roald Dahl, Johnny Depp plays Willy Wonka and Freddie Highmore plays Charlie, who, having found one of five golden tickets hidden in a chocolate bar, wins a tour of Wonka's chocolate factory. Depp, as Wonka, dresses like Oscar Wilde, smiles like Michael Jackson, enunciates like Tootsie, and wears rubbery purple gloves to keep away the germs—and is far more of a child than the actual children around him. The movie is surprisingly unwild, though often astounding—Burton summons succulent and strange details such as a thunderous, cocoa-hued waterfall and bulging pink sheep that are sheared for their fleeces of cotton candy—but the eye, no less than the palate, is at first dizzied, then acclimatized, then jaded, and, finally, semi-sickened. To chide a movie that oozes so many gags may sound churlish, but you can't help feeling that a fantasist as accomplished as Burton can manage this kind of project with his eyes shut.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/25/05.) (In wide release.)

DERSU UZALA
Akira Kurosawa's Siberian nature epic, about a Russian military explorer's friendship with the title character, an Asian hunter, at the turn of the last century, signalled a new style for the sensei and presaged the lion-in-winter glories of Kurosawa's Shakespearean "Ran." From the cascade of gold and russet forest hues to the spare power of the staging, the film brings conviction to the bond between a sensitive, intelligent urbanite and a rural loner fuelled by pantheistic fervor. Kurosawa's monumental sort of dynamism—he plots out the action to the farthest corners of the 70-mm. screen—superbly expresses his view of man's eroding relationship to nature. Dersu's desire to see every element of the wilderness as a live thing was deemed sentimental when the film was first released, in 1975. Now it seems prescient: Dersu raises ecology to the level of religion and practical philosophy. In Russian.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Aug. 8.)

THE EDUKATORS
In a new film by the Austrian director Hans Weingartner, Jule (Julia Jentsch), Jan (Daniel Brühl), and Peter (Stipe Erceg) ask: In a prosperous land, what remains for the young and furious? The solution is what you might call décor terrorism—the trio break into the homes of the rich, rearrange the contents, and leave a note that reads, "You have too much money." Weingartner's movie is never quite as keen-edged as it hopes—or needs—to be, but the movie sharpens up when a break-in goes awry and our heroes take a hostage, a paunchy businessman, Hardenberg (Burghart Klaussner). He is brighter than his captors, and it slowly transpires that, in his past, he was no less inflamed in his beliefs. Weingartner throws in a final twist, slanting the film toward his revolutionaries, but the movie gives us ample, if inadvertent, proof of why it is that the Hardenbergs always end up ruling the world, and why the Jules and the Jans can never be more than licensed fools, capering bitterly around the throne.—*A.L.* (8/1/05) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

"William Wyler's America" continues through Aug. 14 at Bard SummerScape.

RICHARD MERKIN

FANTASTIC FOUR
Four scientists and their corporate sponsor (guess who's the bad guy) are conducting experiments on a space station when they're hit by an unexpectedly powerful blast of solar radiation, altering their DNA and giving them freakish powers that cleverly reflect their personalities. The actors Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Chris Evans, and Michael Chiklis inhabit their dual identities gracefully; they're superheroes without being superstars. It may not have the emotional sweep of "Superman" or "Spider-Man," but "Fantastic Four" glides along free of the dark, pretentious weight of some recent superhero films. The director, Tim Story ("Barbershop"), tells his tale with clarity and wit. It's a simple popcorn movie—not fantastic, but fun.—*Ken Marks* (In wide release.)

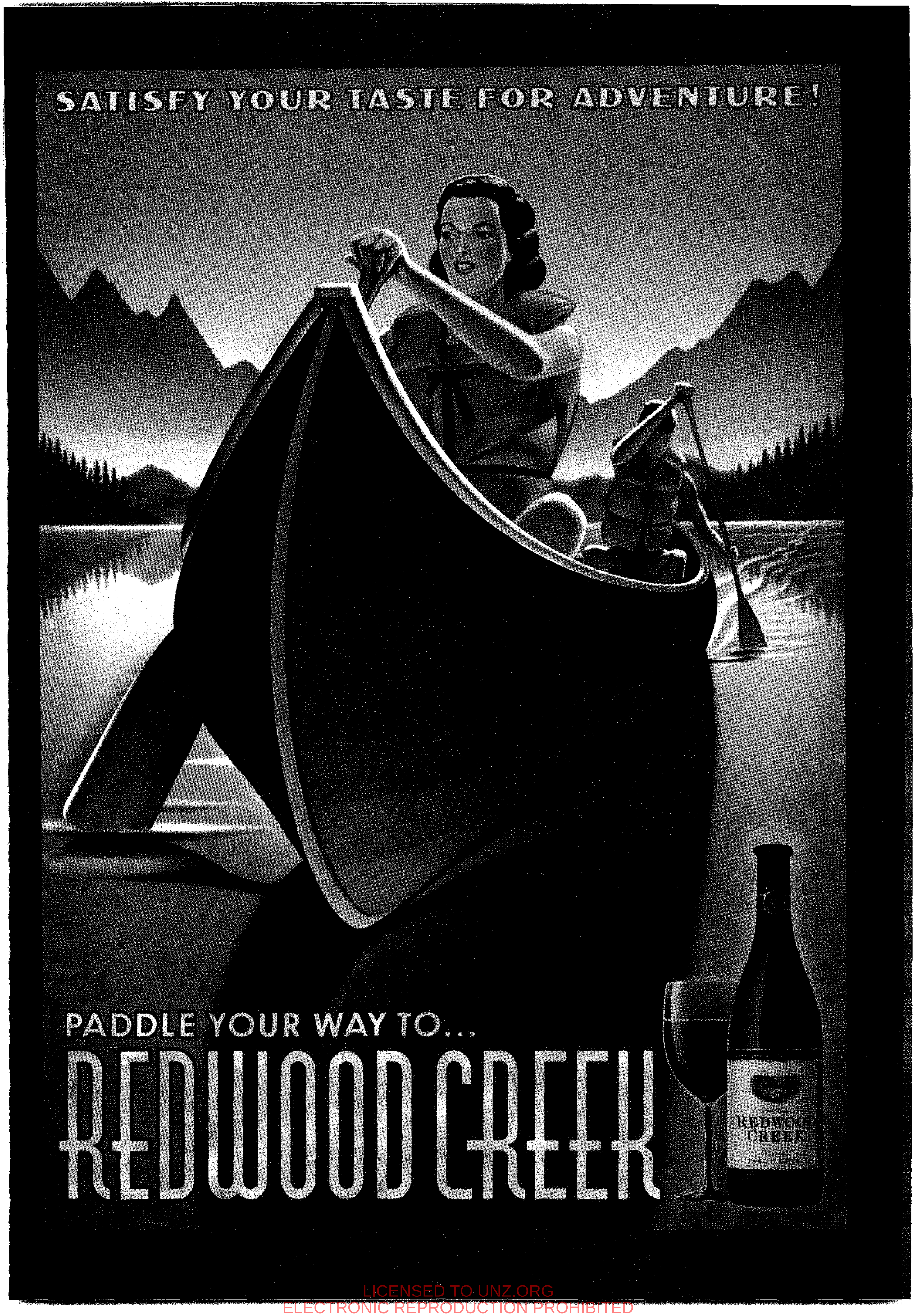
THE GANG'S ALL HERE
Busby Berkeley's own special brand of kaleidoscopic fantasy, turned into psychedelic surrealism by the electric reds and greens of Twentieth Century Fox's color processing. Those who consider Berkeley a master consider this 1943 film his masterpiece. It is his maddest film: chorus girls dissolve into artichokes; there's a banana xylophone; and, for the song "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat," Carmen Miranda appears in platform wedgies on an avenue of giant strawberries. Alice Faye sings the torch song "No Love, No Nothing," and also introduces the "Polka-Dot Polka" ballet, which, as a piece of staging, passes description. With Benny Goodman and his orchestra.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Aug. 12-16.)

HUSTLE & FLOW
As DJay, a low-rent South Memphis pimp, Terrence Howard speaks in a soft, smoky voice that trails off into nowhere. His talkative hustler has the obscure, ruminative wit of an old bluesman; he turns his come-ons and rants into a sullen art. The movie asks whether that particular art is convertible yet again—whether DJay's hustle can be converted into the thumping flow of the Memphis-style rap known as crunk. Written and directed by Craig Brewer, this movie unfolds in the kind of awful heat that wilts any effort aimed at more than mere survival. With Ludacris as a Memphis rapper returning to his home town after having made his fortune in the music business; Taryn Manning, Taraji P. Henson, and Paula Jai Parker as DJay's women; Anthony Anderson as a sound engineer; and D. J. Qualls as a skinny white guy who knows how to lay down crunk's bass-heavy tracks.—*David Denby* (7/11 & 18/05) (In wide release.)

LAST DAYS
In Gus Van Sant's new film, Blake (Michael Pitt) is the lead singer and guitarist of an unnamed rock band, whose body is irredeemably silted up with drugs. In the course of the film, he goes for a walk, eludes company, and finally dies from a bad case of being himself. Any resemblance to the late Kurt Cobain is entirely coincidental. Van Sant refuses to go in fear of the long take, and much of the motion of this film has a hypnotizing grace. The most stubborn virtue of "Last Days" is its reluctance to gild its hero as a poète maudit; instead, he lies somewhere between a lost boy and a total pain. While Van Sant is hardly one of those fulminators who want rockers to go to Hell, neither, on the other hand, is his film in the business of sanctification. It merely hints that some people, gifted or otherwise, may have had enough.—*A.L.* (8/1/05) (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

MARCH OF THE PENGUINS
The French wildlife filmmaker Luc Jacquet spent more than a year chronicling an emperor-penguin colony in Antarctica, and what he discovered was a touching, self-sacrificing ritual of parenthood. Trekking for miles through stunning ice-castle landscapes, Jacquet frames the penguins' mating cycle—from courtship through the birth and rearing of their newborns—as a severe and forbidding ballet that demonstrates the true meaning of survival and determination. Narrated by Morgan Freeman.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MUST LOVE DOGS
It does have a pooch or two, though the writer-director, Gary David Goldberg, doesn't get much out of them—or out of anyone else, either. John Cusack, as a wryly ironic builder of wooden boats, has an easy way with romantic patter, but Diane Lane,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as a divorcée, doesn't have the lightness or the sparkle for this kind of middle-aged-dating picture, and the romantic bond between them that would hold the picture together never really materializes. Goldberg sets the movie in anywhere-and-nowhere suburban kitchens and parks, and he likes to have a lot of people barging on and off the sets or just hanging around and talking. The formidable Christopher Plummer, as Lane's widowed dad, is reduced to a poetry-quoting old fart, though Stockard Channing, as one of Plummer's girlfriends, creates a character out of thin air.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

9 SONGS

And so, in desperation, to bed. That is where Lisa (Margo Stilley) and Matt (Kieran O'Brien) base themselves in Michael Winterbottom's new film, and where we watch them slake their lust. Much has been made of the detail of the proceedings, but when the characters in question are drab to the point of inane, their lovemaking becomes as heated and gripping as blancmange. Winterbottom's motive here—to investigate desire without a blink or a blush—is laudable, but the look of it suggests that he rushed the project through. Matt and Lisa, in their brief inter-intercourse moments, stagger out to see bands such as Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, Franz Ferdinand, and others—the cream of current bands, supposedly, although the uninitiated may wonder why most of the cream sounds like a cow giving birth in a wind tunnel. When neither rock nor movies can take us to where the wild things are, who will show us the way?—*A.L.* (8/1/05) (Angelika Film Center.)

SARABAND

In the film that Ingmar Bergman, now eighty-seven, has declared will be his last, Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson reprise their roles from Bergman's 1973 "Scenes from a Marriage." Marianne, a sixty-three-year-old lawyer, drops in on her ex-husband Johan, an eighty-six-year-old scholar living in rural isolation, whom she has not seen in thirty-two years. Nostalgia quickly dissipates as Marianne is drawn into Johan's titanic battle with his son Henrik (Börje Ahlstedt), a widowed music professor, as conflict over Henrik's possessive plans for his teenage daughter, Karin (Julia Dufvenius), lays bare decades of buried resentments. Johan, an egomaniacal monster whose great charm derives from the force of his unyielding will, might live and laugh mockingly forever—at the expense of those who are drawn to his brutality. At times, the raw power of the emotions is almost unbearable; the director conjures them through somewhat obvious theatrical devices. Nonetheless, his stark contrivances distill a lifetime of bitter wisdom.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

WEDDING CRASHERS

Jeremy (Vince Vaughn) and John (Owen Wilson), a pair of divorce mediators, spend their summer weekends rolling up to the weddings of people they don't know and becoming the life and soul of the party. The director, David Dobkin, and the writers, Steve Faber and Bob Fisher, kick off with a hectic montage of good will, and the first twenty minutes are rabid with simple pleasure. Then Jeremy and John hit a swish society affair, in which the Treasury Secretary, William Cleary (Christopher Walken), is marrying off one of his daughters, leaving two more (Rachel McAdams and Isla Fisher) to be ogled by our heroes, whereupon the fizz—and the generosity—starts to leak away. Thank heaven for the leading men—especially Vaughn, a hopped-up Gary Cooper who shoots his mouth off with such scattershot brio that he flubs the occasional word, or picks an overheated one ("Erroneous! Erroneous!"), or forgets to pause for breath. This is a dumb-ass picture about dumb-ass men. Still, sometimes ten per cent of your brain is just enough.—*A.L.* (7/25/05) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BAD NEWS BEARS: In wide release. **BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS:** Paris. **HAPPY ENDINGS:** In wide release. **THE ISLAND:** In wide release. **MAD HOT BALLROOM:** In wide release. **MURDERBALL:** In wide release. **TONY TAKITANI:** Angelika Film Center. **WAR OF THE WORLDS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New Filmmakers." Aug. 3 at 8:15: "Reeling in Reality" (2005, Ezra Landes). ♦ Through Aug. 4: A tribute to Kino International, featuring Edgar G. Ulmer. Aug. 3-4 at 7: "Edgar G. Ulmer: The Man Off-Screen" (2004, Michael Palm). ♦ Aug. 3 at 9: "Ruthless" (1948). ♦ Aug. 4 at 9: "Detour" (1945). ♦ A tribute to Kino International. Aug. 5 at 7: "The Mirror" (1975, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 5 at 9:15: "The Sacrifice" (1986, Tarkovsky; in Swedish, French, and English). ♦ Aug. 6 at 2:30: "My Name Is Ivan" (1962, Tarkovsky; in Russian and German). ♦ Aug. 6 at 4:30: "Andrei Rublev," the director's cut (1969, Tarkovsky; in Russian and Italian). ♦ Aug. 6 at 8:30: "Solaris" (1972, Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 7 at 2: "Modern Times" (1936, Charles Chaplin). ♦ Aug. 8 at 4: "I Vitelloni" (1953, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 7 at 6: "Metropolis" (1927, Fritz Lang; silent). ♦ Aug. 7 at 8:30: "M" (1931, Lang). ♦ Aug. 8 at 7: "My Friend Ivan Lapshin" (1984, Alexei Gherman; in Russian). ♦ Aug. 8 at 9:15: "Dersu Uzala" (†). ♦ Aug. 9 at 7:30: "The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl" (1993, Ray Müller; in German). ♦ Aug. 10 at 7: "Color of Pomegranates" (1968, Sergei Paradjanov; in Armenian). ♦ Aug. 10 at 9: "Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors" (1964, Paradjanov; in Ukrainian). ♦ Aug. 11 at 7: "Days of Being Wild" (1991, Wong Kar-wai; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 11 at 9: "The Killer" (1989, John Woo; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 12 at 7: "Fallen Angels" (1995, Kar-wai; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 12 at 9: "Happy Together" (1997, Kar-wai; in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish). ♦ Aug. 13 at 2: "Steamboat Bill, Jr." (1928, Charles Reisner; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 4: "The General" (1927, Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 6: "The Piano Teacher" (2001, Michael Haneke; in French). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8:45: "Time Regained" (1999, Raoul Ruiz; in French). ♦ Aug. 14 at 2: "Visions of Light: The Art of Cinematography" (1992, Arnold Glassman, Todd McCarthy, and Stuart Samuels). ♦ Aug. 14 at 4: "The Bicycle Thief" (1948, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6: "The Blue Angel" (1930, Josef von Sternberg; in German). ♦ Aug. 14 at 8:15: "8½" (1963, Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 15 at 7: "Match Factory Girl" (1990, Aki Kaurismäki; in Finnish). ♦ Aug. 15 at 9: "La Vie de Bohème" (1992, Kaurismäki; in French). ♦ Aug. 16 at 7: "Les Bonnes Femmes" (1960, Claude Chabrol; in French). ♦ Aug. 16 at 9: "Faust" (1926, F. W. Murnau; silent).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"A New World: Shirley Clarke." Aug. 3 at 6:50 and 9:15: Short films by Shirley Clarke. ♦ Aug. 4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Lions Love" (1969, Agnès Varda). ♦ "Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: The Shaw Brothers." Aug. 5 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Kingdom and the Beauty" (1959, Li Han-Hsiang; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 6 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Love Eterne" (1963, Han-Hsiang; in Mandarin and Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 7 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Come Drink with Me" (1966, King Hu; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 12 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Empress Dowager" (1975, Han-Hsiang; in Cantonese). ♦ Aug. 13 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan" (1972, Chor Yuen; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Golden Swallow" (1968, Chang Cheh; in Mandarin). ♦ "Lonely Heart: Philippe Garrel." All films are in French. Aug. 8 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Inner Scar" (1972, Garrel) and "Philippe Garrel, Artiste" (1998, Françoise Etchegaray). ♦ Aug. 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Liberty, Night" (1983, Garrel). ♦ Aug. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Emergency Kisses" (1989, Garrel). ♦ Aug. 16 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "I Can No Longer Hear the Guitar" (1991, Garrel). ♦ "Cinemachat with Elliott Stein." Aug. 10 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The 13th Letter" (1951, Otto Preminger). ♦ "Ismail Merchant Remembered." Aug. 11 at 6:30 and 9:15: "In Custody" (1993, Ismail Merchant).

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
The Milton and Sally Avery Center for the Arts, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. (845-758-7900)—"William Wyler's America," films featuring scores by Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson. Aug. 4 at 7: "Of Mice and Men" (1939, Lewis Milestone). ♦ Aug. 7 at 7: "The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress" (1944, William Wyler), "The City" (1939, Willard Van Dyke and Ralph Steiner), and "The Cummington Story" (1945, Helen Grayson and Larry Madison). ♦ Aug. 11 at 7: "Our Town" (1940, Sam Wood). ♦ Aug. 14 at 7: "The Red Pony" (1949, Milestone) and "Once Upon a Time" (1974, Larry Jordan).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Special screening of a new 35-mm. print. Aug. 3-11 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:40, and 10: "The Conformist" (1970, Bernardo Bertolucci; in Italian). ♦ Special screenings. Aug. 12-16 at 1:20, 5:10, and 9 and Aug. 12-13 at 10:45: "Cobra Woman" (1944, Robert Siodmak). ♦ Aug. 12-16 at 3:10 and 7: "The Gang's All Here" (†).

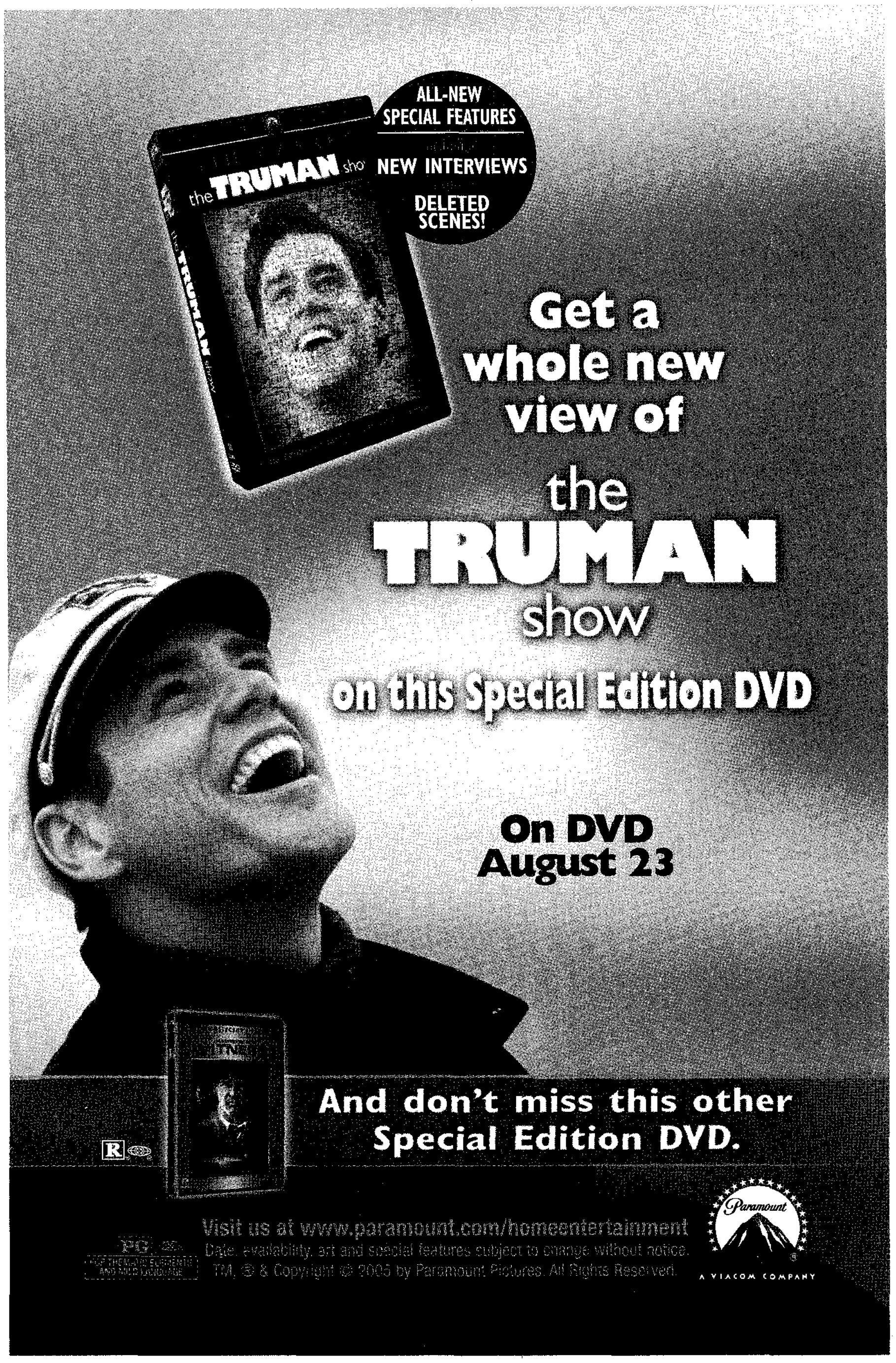
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Occupation of France Series." Aug. 9 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "D-Day + 60: An Affair to Remember" (2004, Robin Massee) and "Joan of Paris" (1942, Robert Stevenson). ♦ Aug. 16 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Story of Women" (1988, Claude Chabrol; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Weekend Classics." Aug. 6-7 at noon: "Equinox Flower" (1958, Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 13-14 at noon: "Good Morning" (1959, Ozu; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Aug. 5-6: "Party Monster" (2003, Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato). ♦ Aug. 12-13: "Downtown 81" (1981, Edo Bertoglio).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—The films of Gregory La Cava. Aug. 3 at 6: "Private Worlds" (1935). ♦ Aug. 3 at 8: "She Married Her Boss" (1935). ♦ Aug. 4 at 6: "Gabriel Over the White House" (1933). ♦ Aug. 4 at 8: "Symphony of Six Million" (1932). ♦ Aug. 5 at 6: "Fifth Avenue Girl" (1939). ♦ Aug. 5 at 8: "Primrose Path" (1940). ♦ Aug. 6 at 2 and Aug. 8 at 8: "His Nibs" (1921; silent). ♦ Aug. 6 at 4 and Aug. 8 at 6: "Let's Get Married" (1926; silent). ♦ Aug. 6 at 6 and Aug. 11 at 8: "Womanhandled" (1925; silent). ♦ Aug. 6 at 8 and Aug. 11 at 6: "The Affairs of Cellini" (1934). ♦ Aug. 7 at 2: "The Age of Consent" (1932). ♦ Aug. 7 at 5 and Aug. 12 at 5:30: "What Every Woman Knows" (1934). ♦ Aug. 10 at 6 and Aug. 13 at 6:30: "Unfinished Buisness" (1941). ♦ Aug. 10 at 8 and Aug. 13 at 8:30: "Lady in a Jam" (1942). ♦ Aug. 12 at 7:30: "Smart Woman" (1931). ♦ Aug. 12 at 9 and Aug. 14 at 5: "Feel My Pulse" (1928; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 2 and Aug. 15 at 6: "Living in a Big Way" (1947). ♦ Aug. 13 at 4:30 and Aug. 14 at 2: Animated films by Gregory La Cava. ♦ Aug. 15 at 8:15: "Bed of Roses" (1933).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Outdoor Cinema (at Socrates Sculpture Park, on Broadway at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City). Aug. 3 at 7: "Knife in the Water" (1962, Roman Polanski; in Polish). ♦ Aug. 10 at 7: "House Party" (1990, Reginald Hudlin). ♦ "Asian Cinevisions." Aug. 5 at 7:30: "Just One Look" (2002, Riley Ip; in Cantonese). ♦ Through Aug. 21: A Raoul Walsh retrospective. Aug. 6 at 2: "Gentleman Jim" (1942). ♦ Aug. 6 at 4:30: "Uncertain Glory" (1944). ♦ Aug. 7 at 2: "Objective, Burma!" (1945). ♦ Aug. 7 at 4:45: "Regeneration" (1915; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 2: "Manpower" (1941). ♦ Aug. 13-14 at 4:30: "Pursued" (1947). ♦ Aug. 14 at 2: "Colorado Territory" (1949). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 6-7 at 6:30: "Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ Aug. 13-14 at 6:30: "Wild Strawberries" (1957; Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Cinema Tropical." Aug. 12 at 7:30: "Merry Christmas" (2000, Lucho Bender; in Spanish and Hebrew).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Aug. 5-6: "Lollipop Girls in Hard Candy,"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in 3-D (1976, Stephen Gibson). ♦ Aug. 12-13: "Starship Troopers" (1997, Paul Verhoeven).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Divas!" Aug. 2 at 6: "Sunset Boulevard" (1950, Billy Wilder). ♦ Aug. 2 at 8: "A Star Is Born" (1954, George Cukor). ♦ Aug. 6 at 6 and Aug. 9 at 8: "Scarlet Empress" (1934, Josef von Sternberg). ♦ Aug. 6 at 8 and Aug. 9 at 6: "Queen Christina" (1933, Rouben Mamoulian). ♦ Aug. 13 at 6 and Aug. 16 at 8: "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman" (1951, Albert Lewin). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8:15 and Aug. 16 at 6: "Jezebel" (1938, William Wyler).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screening. Aug. 3 at 5, Aug. 4-5 at 4, Aug. 5 at 9:30, Aug. 6-8 at 2 and 4:15, Aug. 8 at 6:20 and 8:30, Aug. 9-10 at 4:15, 6:20, and 8:30, and Aug. 11 at 4:15 and 9: "The River" (1951, Jean Renoir). ♦ "Young Friends of Film Presents." Aug. 3 at 7:30: "Walking and Talking" (1996, Nicole Holofcener). ♦ Special screenings. Aug. 5 at 6:30: "Ferpect Crime" (2004, Álex de la Iglesia; in Spanish). ♦ Aug. 6 at 6:30 and 9:15: "Paris Is Burning" (1990, Jennie Livingston). ♦ Advance screening. Aug. 7 at 6:30: "The Constant Gardener" (2005, Fernando Meirelles). ♦ Independents night. Aug. 11 at 6:30: "Romántico" (2005, Mark Becker). ♦ Through Aug. 18: "Dedication and Discovery: 15 Years of Milestone Films." Aug. 12 at 4, Aug. 13 at 9, and Aug. 15 at 2 and 9: "Piccadilly" (1929, E. A. Dupont). ♦ Aug. 12 at 6:30, Aug. 13 at 4, and Aug. 14 at 6:30: "Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell and Kenyon" (1900-13, Mitchell & Kenyon). ♦ Aug. 12 at 8, Aug. 13 at 2 and 6, Aug. 14 at 8, and Aug. 15 at 4:15: "Winter Soldier" (1972, Winterfilm Collective). ♦ Aug. 14 and Aug. 16 at 2: "The Troubles We've Seen: A History of Journalism in Wartime" (1994, Max Ophüls; in French).

READINGS AND TALKS

"PARK LIT"

The roving summertime reading series moves to Madison Square Park, where Luc Sante, Masha Gessen, and James Lasdun will read from their contributions to *Granta*. (Fifth Ave. at 24th St. For more information, call 212-696-6609. Aug. 4 at 6:30.)

BOOKCOURT

Two products of East Coast boarding schools stop by Aug. 4 at 8: Sean Wilsey reads from his memoir, "Oh the Glory of It All," and Curtis Sittenfeld offers selections from her novel, "Prep." (163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.)

BRYANT PARK READING ROOM

The Academy of American Poets presents Tina Chang, Major Jackson, and Tom Thompson. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-274-0343. Aug. 9 at 6:30.)

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Danyel Smith, the former editor of *Vibe*, reads from her second novel, "Bliss," about a music-industry executive confronting existential and career crises. (Central Library, Grand Army Plaza. 718-230-2100. Aug. 10 at 7.)

"MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN"

The Museum of the American Cocktail is currently situated in New Orleans, but this summer it is presenting lectures in a cooler clime. On Aug. 10 at 5:30, two of its founders, Anistatia Miller and Jared Brown, discuss mojitos, Daiquiris, piña coladas, and other summer drinks. Cocktails will be available. (Ruth's Chris Steak House, 148 W. 51st St. For details, visit www.museumoftheamericancocktail.org.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"CRAB CRUNCH"

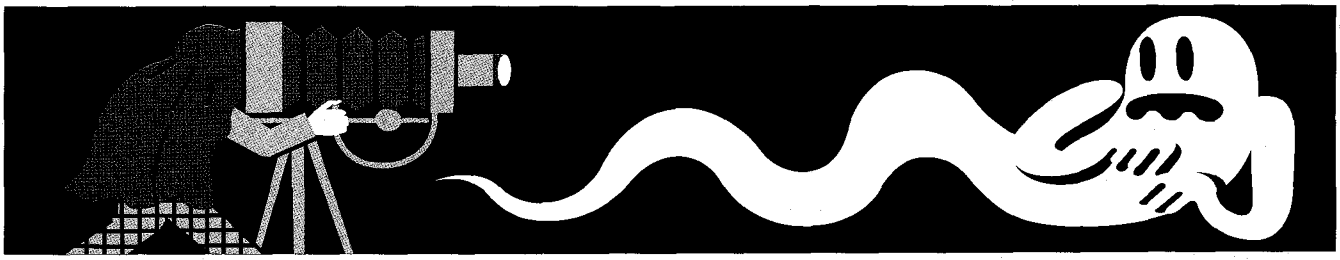
Christopher Letts and Tom Lake, naturalists with the Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research, will offer free samples of blue crab, along with tidbits about the crab's history and tips on how to catch, crack, and eat it. (The River Project, Pier 26, West St. between Canal and Chambers Sts. For more information, call 212-233-3030. Aug. 6 from 3 to 6.)

"LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS"

The free alfresco festival of music, dance, and other amusements celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary, starting on Aug. 13 with an afternoon performance of dances from around the world. Japanese drumming, a circus act, and a giant-puppet version of "Moby-Dick" will follow. The opening festivities continue that evening, when the New Orleans piano master Dr. John and the leggy swamp-rocker Marcia Ball take the stage. On Aug. 14, there's a homemade-instrument workshop, followed by more dancing, drumming, and a jazz concert. Through Sept. 4. (For more information, call 212-875-5766, or visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Women flash thousand-watt smiles as they run across the beach, sailboats drift below a lighthouse that overlooks a protected cove—these and many more images of summer can be found at **Swann's** sale of vintage posters on Aug. 3. The highest-value item is a poster for "The Sheik," the 1921 silent that catapulted Rudolph Valentino to stardom; political posters, including the famous 1917 illustration of Uncle Sam demanding "I Want YOU," are also on offer. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



RICHARD MC GUIRE

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
BILLY WILDER

Sept. 10-Nov. 13

As a writer and director, Wilder received twenty Oscar nominations. A complete retrospective at the Museum of the Moving Image includes "Double Indemnity," "Sunset Boulevard," and the rarely screened comedy "Kiss Me, Stupid." (718-784-0077.)

NIGHT LIFE
SEU JORGE

Sept. 11-12

The Brazilian singer and actor, who lent a comic touch to "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" with his acoustic renditions of classic David Bowie songs, played a sold-out show at S.O.B.'s back in June. With a new album of original songs, "Cru," due out in early September, he returns for two nights at the Bowery Ballroom. Expect celebrities—his "Life Aquatic" co-star Bill Murray attended the last show. (212-533-2111.)

THE THEATRE
NEW MUSICALS

Sept. 12-Oct. 2

The New York Musical Theatre Festival presents more than thirty shows. Look for "The Big Time," a comedy set on a U.N. ship; "Nerds://A Musical Software Satire," about Steve Jobs and Bill Gates; and fresh takes on Bonnie and Clyde and Dorothy Parker. (212-352-3101.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LEVINE AT THE MET

Sept. 19

James Levine conducts the Metropolitan Opera's gala opening night, with a program that consists of Act II of "Tosca," Act I of "Le Nozze di Figaro," and Act III of "Samson et Dalila," and a roster that includes Angela Gheorghiu, Susan Graham, Bryn Terfel, and Plácido Domingo. (212-362-6000.)

ART
SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Sept. 27-Dec. 31

Nowadays, we're used to seeing fuzzy snapshots of Nessie, Bigfoot, and flying saucers, but in the early days of photography, spiritualists produced astonishing "evidence" of things unseen. "The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult," coming to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, will include more than a hundred nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photographs. (212-879-5500.)

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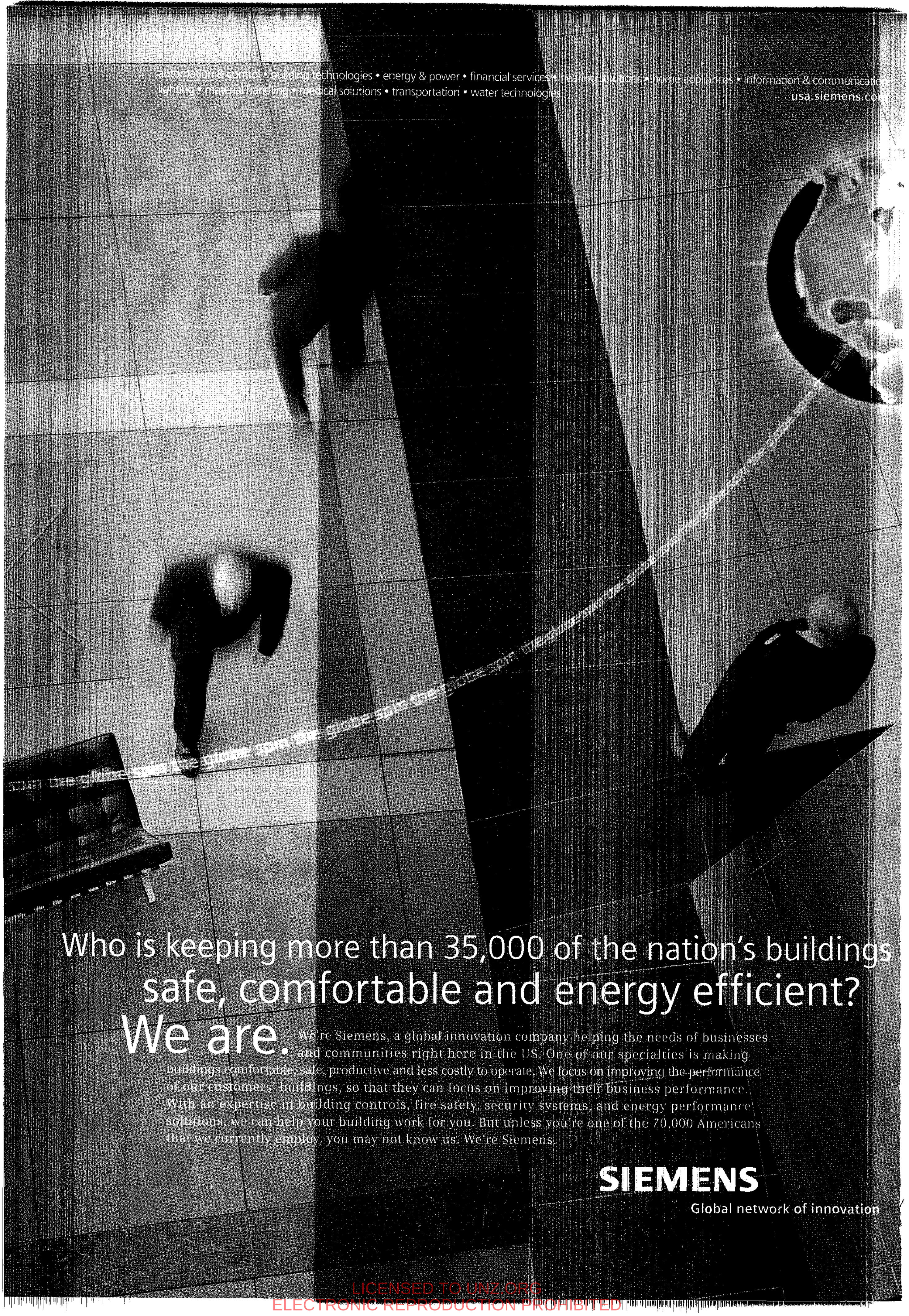
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

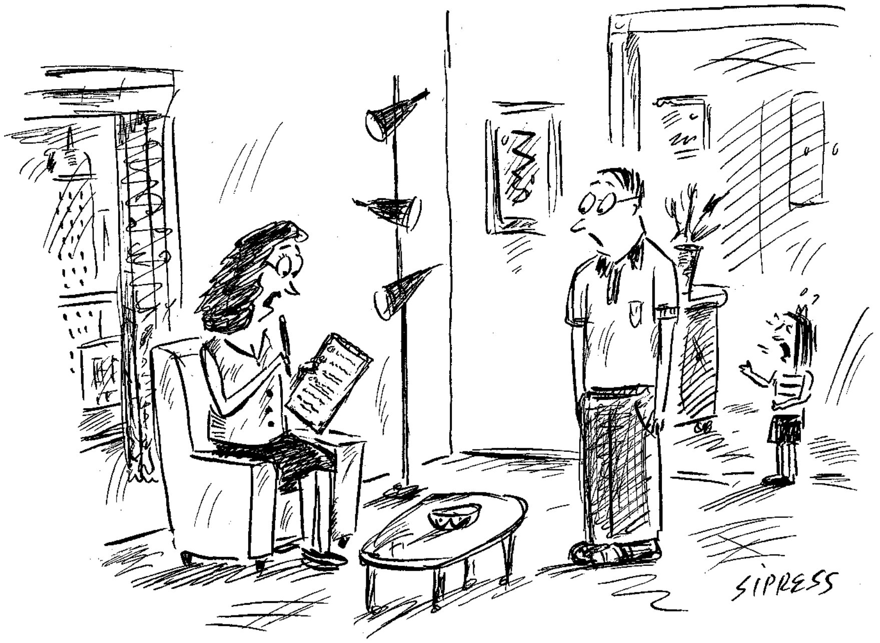
COMMENT
NAME CALLING

You had to be a careful reader of the inside pages of the *Times* last week to notice that America is no longer fighting the global war on terrorism. The Administration has replaced, or revised, or expanded the G.W.O.T. with a new phrase: "a global struggle against violent extremism." The war is now a struggle. The terrorist enemy is now the violent extremist enemy. The focus has shifted from a tactic to an ideology. In a major new strategy document quoted in *U.S. News & World Report*, the Pentagon is even more specific (and more accurate), venturing onto delicate ground by calling the threat "Islamist extremism" and "extremist Sunni and Shia movements that exploit Islam for political ends." In June, a Marine lieutenant general, Wallace Gregson, floated the new thinking in a speech: "This is no more a war on terrorism than the Second World War was a war on submarines," he said. "The decisive terrain in this war is the vast majority of people who are not directly involved but whose support, willing or coerced, is necessary to insurgent operations around the world." On July 12th, Donald Rumsfeld used the new language in a press conference, repeating the word "extremist" or variations of it eleven times. On July 23rd, two top White House officials followed up with an Op-Ed in the *Times:* "At its root, the struggle is an ideological contest, a war of ideas that engages all of us, public servant and private citizen, regardless of nationality." The President's chief of staff, Andrew Card, once said of war planning for Iraq, "You don't introduce new products in August," but the rebranding of the war formerly known as G.W.O.T. has all the earmarks of a full-blown summer marketing campaign. What's going on here?

Something serious, in fact—almost unprecedented. The Administration is admitting that its strategy since September 11th has failed, without really admitting it. The single-minded emphasis on hunting down terrorists has failed ("Hearts and minds are more important than capturing and killing people," Gregson said). The use of military force as the country's primary and, at times, only response has failed, and has stretched the Army and the Marines to the breaking point. Unilateralism has failed. "It's not a military project alone, and the United States cannot do it by itself alone," Douglas Feith, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy and a leading advocate of going it alone with military force, said on his way out the Pentagon door and into private life (good luck, fellas!). The overwhelmingly American character of the war has failed, isolating moderate Muslims—who, in the end, are the only hope for political change—or driving them closer to the radicals. Loading the entire burden of the war onto the backs of American soldiers, while telling the rest of the citizenry to go about its business, has failed, even as public relations: in a recent Gallup poll, only thirty-four per cent of Americans said that we are winning the war on terrorism. The phrase has outlived its enormous political usefulness.

These recognitions are late in coming. Arguments for a broader, deeper, more nuanced strategy appeared in the report of the 9/11 Commission, a year ago. They were the basis for a sixteen-billion-dollar national-security bill that was introduced by Senate Democrats in January, and is currently going nowhere. At the Pentagon, they date back to October of 2003, to a memorandum in which Rumsfeld candidly asked, "Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and de-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO



"I'm making a list of everything we have to do before we go away so we can freak out in some kind of order."

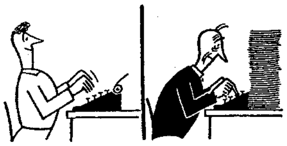
ploying against us?" Almost two years later, in the summer of Sharm al-Sheikh, Netanya, London, and Baghdad (where 7/7 is an average day), the answer is no. Jihadis are crossing the borders into Iraq, for example, far faster than they can be killed or kill themselves. A recent study by an Israeli researcher shows that they are predominantly young Saudis, inflamed by footage of the fighting in Iraq and by incendiary sermons from their imams. Do they hate us for who we are, or for what we do? That turns out to be the wrong question. Most of the new jihadis had no connection to terrorism before the Iraq war; the American occupation has filled them with fantasies of violent death. But they come largely from a region in Saudi Arabia where the most extreme Islamist ideology was already flourishing, directed against Shiite Muslims as well as against "crusaders and Jews." They have the sympathy of millions of fellow-travellers. The war in Iraq is the trigger, not the reason, for their self-annihilation.

A better question is the one suggested by Lieutenant General Gregson: what can be done to persuade the millions of Muslims on whose support the jihadis depend to abandon their ideology? In the wake of the London bombings and the daily massacres of Iraqis, gaps are opening in the ranks of radical Islam. Even certain jihadi Web sites have posted heated arguments over the morality of killing innocents; none other than the spiritual mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi has attacked his own disciple for giving jihad a bad name in Iraq. But radical Islam is not a problem that Muslims can sort out alone. The grand gamble of the architects of the Iraq war was that a democratic state in the heart of the Middle East would change the political dynamic throughout the region. Right now, the best we can salvage is an Iraq that doesn't descend into communal violence on a large scale. It seems likely that the Administration will begin to withdraw American forces from Iraq early next year, well ahead of the midterm elections in November—regardless of the realities. Only yesterday, Iraq was the central front in the war on terrorism; perhaps the Pentagon's new terminology is the linguistic version of an exit strategy. But no one should imagine that an American departure will end suicide bombings in Iraq, or anywhere else. Just as the jihadis in Afghanistan did not retire after expelling the Soviets fifteen years ago, the withdrawal of another superpower will not be enough for this generation of insurgents, either.

In Iraq, America has run up against the limits of war in an ideological contest. The Administration is right to reconsider its strategy, starting with the language. Will anything else follow? The global struggle against violent extremism would inspire more confidence if, for example, the Administration hadn't failed to include funding for democracy programs in Iraq beyond the next round of elections there; or if Karen Hughes, the President's choice as Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, hadn't left the job empty for five months while waiting for her son to graduate from high school; or if the White House weren't resisting attempts by Congress to regulate the treatment of prisoners; or if Karl Rove would stop using 9/11 to raise money and smear Democrats. No one really knows how American influence can be used to disinfect Islamist politics of violent ideas. This is the first problem. The second is that the Bush team has shown such bad faith, arrogance, and incompetence since September 11th that it seems unlikely to figure it out.

—*George Packer*

INK
DEAR DIARIST



Ned Rorem, the composer and author of scandalous diaries, summers on Nantucket, but he ventured into town the other day to give a reading, in connection with the publication of his selected letters. Two days later, retreating from a steamy afternoon to his rent-controlled apartment on West Seventieth Street, he reflected on the experience. Barefoot in khaki shorts, legs crossed, sipping sparkling apple juice from a cordial glass, he reclined on a sofa that faced his collection of portraits of himself. His features conveyed a disappointed nobility. "Nothing could be more egocentric than a person reading his own letters to other people," he said. "But then all art is egocentric. Beethoven assumes that you want to listen to those goddam symphonies of his."

Beethoven is a sore point: almost all of the paltry attention and money that classical musicians are paid these days goes to performers of old standbys, like Beethoven, Mozart, and Dvořák. Rorem still receives many commissions: he just finished an opera based on Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," and he was about

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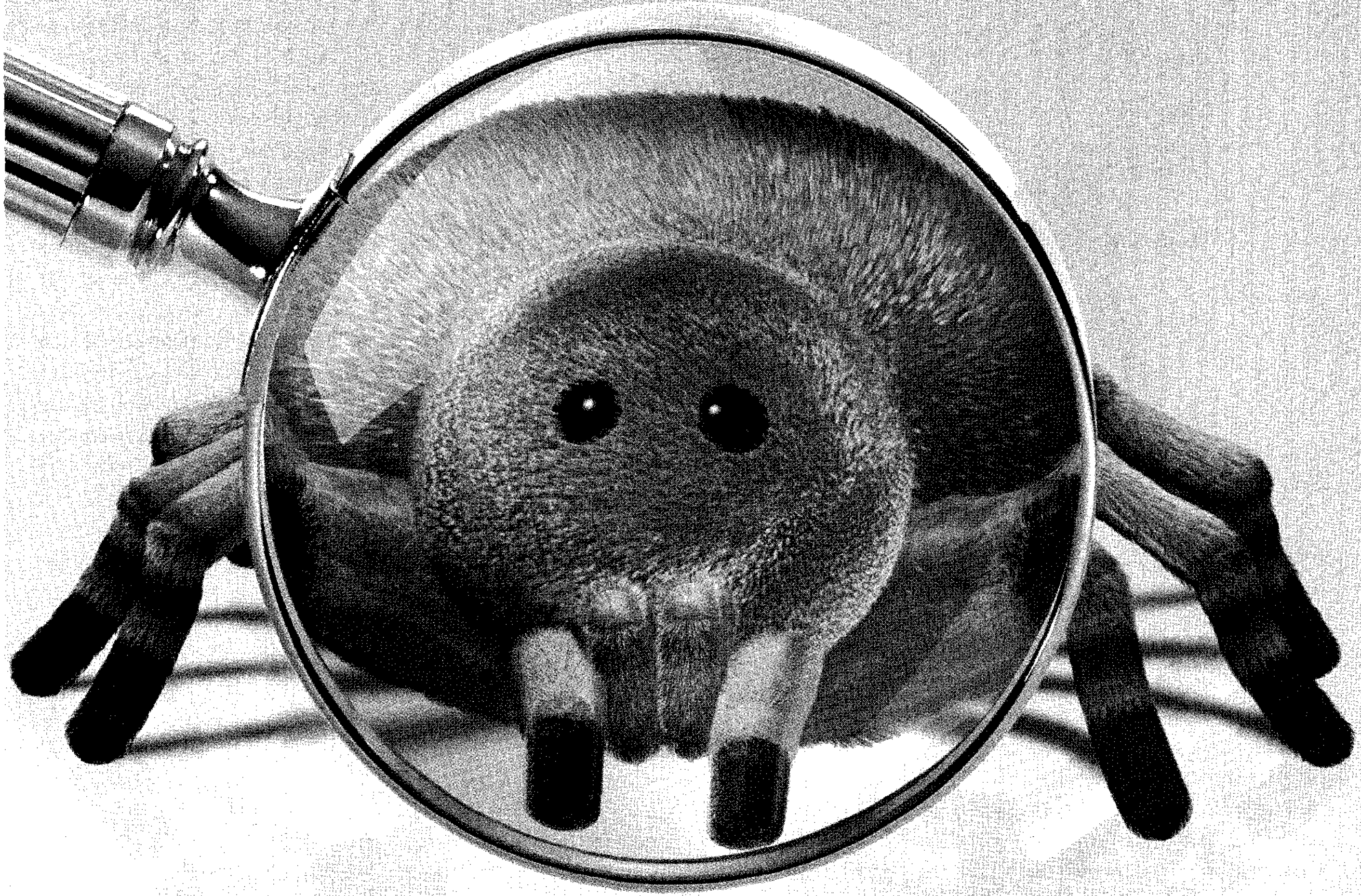

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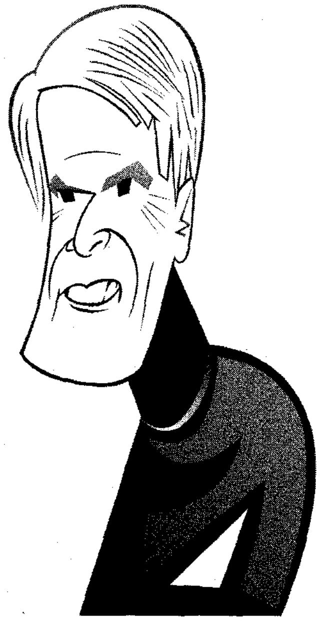
to turn his mind to three short choral pieces. Two years ago, when he turned eighty, his birthday was celebrated with concerts all over the world. Still. "It was nothing compared with Paris Hilton," he said. A world so debased is one in which Rorem has only limited interest. "I don't go to concerts much," he said. "I've heard everything. When I do go to movies, I walk out half the time. As for literature, I've read everything."


Ned Rorem

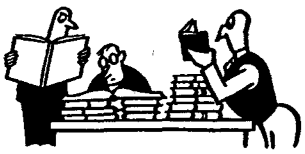
But if New York's culture no longer draws him, the allure of its medical opportunities remains fresh. Rorem has long been, by his own admission, a dedicated hypochondriac, although both of his parents lived heartily into their nineties and he himself appears twenty years younger than he is. He spends a great deal of his time with doctors. Earlier that afternoon, for instance, he had had his left ear scanned. His letters are filled with news of bodily affliction: a sore throat, a broken ankle, a bee sting on his knee, flu, hay fever, insomnia, an unspecified urethra condition, a left forefinger cut while opening a can of cat food, diverticulitis, aches, coughing, hemorrhoids, shingles, stress, depression, more hemorrhoids. "Yesterday we had a dreadful massacre at noon right in the Place de la Rade of Hyères," he wrote to his old friend Paul Bowles in 1961. "An Arab went berserk and killed some people (who were waiting for a bus) and disemboweled a dog. I pray that this won't happen to me in Tangier, because I just had a tetanus shot (for a smashed thumb) which nearly killed me."

As a young composer, Rorem was famous for his beauty. When he lived in Paris, in the nineteen-fifties, he knew everybody—Cocteau, Picasso, Nadia Boulanger. No one could resist him. He boasted that he had slept with four *Time* covers: Leonard Bernstein, Tennessee Williams, Noël Coward, and John Cheever. These early conquests furnished the material for the first of his six published diaries, written in his arch, baroque prose (in the letters, "Swarthy James of the cranberry triceps" is a characteristic salutation). Inevitably, then, the passing of his youth was painful. "Now when entering a bar . . . no head turns," he wrote in a long, unsent letter to Claude Lebon, a musical dentist who broke his heart in 1956. "To think: just two days ago I was always the youngest at parties. . . . I've no more time to lose with those who don't pay me court."

These days, his evenings are quieter. "I look at 'Jeopardy!' " he said. "I play Scrabble every night with my friend"—a thirty-eight-year-old director of television commercials whom he has known for a year and a half. In 1999, Rorem's partner of thirty-two years, the organist and musicologist James Holmes, died of AIDS. Since then, life has lost its savor. "There's nothing I look forward to," Rorem said. "I've seen everything. It sounds blasé, but it's true." It has been years since Rorem wrote to a friend, about an upcoming trip to Greece, "I know *nobody* there—except Princess Irene and Melina Mercouri. (I'm reminded of Virgil Thomson returning to Rome after a hiatus of twenty years: 'I don't know anyone there anymore, except the French ambassador and the Pope.')"

—*Larissa MacFarquhar*

THE BENCH
LET'S GO: LIBEL



When the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center, Rachel Ehrenfeld was sitting at her desk in her apartment in midtown. "I was on the phone with my editor in Brussels, finishing an op-ed about terror financing for the European edition of the *Wall Street Journal*," she said the other day. "I ran up to the roof to see what was going on, then I came back downstairs and did a new lead. It ran the next day."

An Israeli-born American citizen, Ehrenfeld has been writing about terror in its various forms for about twenty years. She developed a special expertise in tracing the money behind terrorist organizations, and after 9/11 she wrote a book called "Funding Evil," largely about the financing of Al Qaeda. Like other authors, Ehrenfeld drew passing attention to the role of Khalid bin Mahfouz, a member of a prominent Saudi banking family, who was, she wrote, allegedly involved "in the funding of terrorism."

Bin Mahfouz was also, it turned out, one of London's most prominent "libel tourists," the term for those non-Britons who try to take advantage of the country's pro-plaintiff libel laws. Those laws not only make it easy for plaintiffs to win damage awards but also allow American publications with small circulations in the U.K. to be sued in the London courts. The best-known recent libel tourist is Roman Polanski, who last month won a judgment against *Vanity Fair*, which is owned by the same company as this magazine; Polanski was not even required to travel to England to bring his case.

Shortly after the publication of "Funding Evil," Ehrenfeld began receiving demands for retractions from British lawyers for the bin Mahfouz family. She refused to give in, so in 2004 she was sued before the same London judge who decided the Polanski case. "My book wasn't even published in England," Ehrenfeld says. "But they said that because someone bought twenty-three copies there online, that was enough for me to be sued there."

Ultimately, Ehrenfeld decided not to go to England and contest the suit. "There was no way to win," she said. "Under English law, it wasn't enough that I could prove that I had written what my sources told me, but I would have had to prove the underlying truth of the accusations as well. No one can meet that standard." So last year the judge entered a default judgment against Ehrenfeld, which now amounts to at least a hundred thousand dollars.

Ehrenfeld then hit on a novel strategy. Having lost the libel case abroad, she sued new

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Important Safety Information: Be sure you have at least eight hours to devote to sleep before becoming active. Until you know how you'll react to Lunesta, you should not drive or operate machinery. Do not use alcohol while taking Lunesta. All sleep medicines carry some risk of dependency. Side effects may include unpleasant taste, headache, drowsiness and dizziness. *See important patient information on the next page.*

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LUNESTA is used to treat different types of sleep problems, such as difficulty in falling asleep, difficulty in maintaining sleep during the night, and waking up too early in the morning. Most people with insomnia have more than one of these problems. You should take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed because of the risk of falling.

LUNESTA belongs to a group of medicines known as "hypnotics" or, simply, sleep medicines. There are many different sleep medicines available to help people sleep better. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent. It usually requires treatment for only a short time, usually 7 to 10 days up to 2 weeks. If your insomnia does not improve after 7 to 10 days of treatment, see your doctor, because it may be a sign of an underlying condition. Some people have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. However, you should not use these medicines for long periods without talking with your doctor about the risks and benefits of prolonged use.

Side Effects

All medicines have side effects. The most common side effects of sleep medicines are:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Difficulty with coordination

Sleep medicines can make you sleepy during the day. How drowsy you feel depends upon how your body reacts to the medicine, which sleep medicine you are taking, and how large a dose your doctor has prescribed. Daytime drowsiness is best avoided by taking the lowest dose possible that will still help you sleep at night. Your doctor will work with you to find the dose of LUNESTA that is best for you. Some people taking LUNESTA have reported next-day sleepiness.

To manage these side effects while you are taking this medicine:

- When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are taking LUNESTA or any sleep medicine. Alcohol can increase the side effects of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
- Do not take any other medicines without asking your doctor first. This includes medicines you can buy without a prescription. Some medicines can cause drowsiness and are best avoided while taking LUNESTA.
- Always take the exact dose of LUNESTA prescribed by your doctor. Never change your dose without talking to your doctor first.

Special Concerns

There are some special problems that may occur while taking sleep medicines.

Memory Problems

Sleep medicines may cause a special type of memory loss or "amnesia." When this occurs, a person may not remember what has happened for several hours after taking the medicine. This is usually not a problem since most people fall asleep after taking the medicine. Memory loss can be a problem, however, when sleep medicines are taken while traveling, such as during an airplane flight and the person wakes up before the effect of the medicine is gone. This has been called "traveler's amnesia." Memory problems have been reported rarely by patients taking LUNESTA in clinical studies. In most cases, memory problems can be avoided if you take LUNESTA only when you are able to get a full night of sleep before you need to be active again. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you think you are having memory problems.

Tolerance

When sleep medicines are used every night for more than a few weeks, they may lose their effectiveness in helping you sleep. This is known as "tolerance." Development of tolerance to LUNESTA was not observed in a clinical study of 6 months' duration. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent, and prolonged use of sleep medicines is generally not necessary. Some people, though, have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. If your sleep problems continue, consult your doctor, who will determine whether other measures are needed to overcome your sleep problems.

Dependence

Sleep medicines can cause dependence in some people, especially when these medicines are used regularly for longer than a few weeks or at high doses. Dependence is the need to continue taking a medicine because stopping it is unpleasant.

When people develop dependence, stopping the medicine suddenly may cause unpleasant symptoms (see *Withdrawal* below). They may find they have to keep taking the medicine either at the prescribed dose or at increasing doses just to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

All people taking sleep medicines have some risk of becoming dependent on the medicine. However, people who have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs in the past may have a higher chance of becoming addicted to sleep medicines. This possibility must be considered before using these medicines for more than a few weeks. If you have been addicted to alcohol or drugs in the past, it is important to tell your doctor before starting LUNESTA or any sleep medicine.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms may occur when sleep medicines are stopped suddenly after being used daily for a long time. In some cases, these symptoms can occur even if the medicine has been used for only a week or two. In mild cases, withdrawal symptoms may include unpleasant feelings. In more severe cases, abdominal and muscle cramps, vomiting, sweating, shakiness, and, rarely, seizures may occur. These more severe withdrawal symptoms are very uncommon. Although withdrawal symptoms have not been observed in the relatively limited controlled trials experience with LUNESTA, there is, nevertheless, the risk of such events in association with the use of any sleep medicine.

Another problem that may occur when sleep medicines are stopped is known as "rebound insomnia." This means that a person may have more trouble sleeping the first few nights after the medicine is stopped than before starting the medicine. If you should experience rebound insomnia, do not get discouraged. This problem usually goes away on its own after 1 or 2 nights.

If you have been taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for more than 1 or 2 weeks, do not stop taking it on your own. Always follow your doctor's directions.

Changes In Behavior And Thinking

Some people using sleep medicines have experienced unusual changes in their thinking and/or behavior. These effects are not common. However, they have included:

- More outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal
- Confusion
- Strange behavior
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Worsening of depression
- Suicidal thoughts

How often these effects occur depends on several factors, such as a person's general health, the use of other medicines, and which sleep medicine is being used. Clinical experience with LUNESTA suggests that it is rarely associated with these behavior changes.

It is also important to realize it is rarely clear whether these behavior changes are caused by the medicine, are caused by an illness, or have occurred on their own. In fact, sleep problems that do not improve may be due to illnesses that were present before the medicine was used. If you or your family notice any changes in your behavior, or if you have any unusual or disturbing thoughts, call your doctor immediately.

Pregnancy And Breastfeeding

Sleep medicines may cause sedation or other potential effects in the unborn baby when used during the last weeks of pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, or if you become pregnant while taking LUNESTA.

In addition, a very small amount of LUNESTA may be present in breast milk after use of the medication. The effects of very small amounts of LUNESTA on an infant are not known; therefore, as with all other prescription sleep medicines, it is recommended that you not take LUNESTA if you are breastfeeding a baby.

Safe Use Of Sleep Medicines

To ensure the safe and effective use of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, you should observe the following cautions:

1. LUNESTA is a prescription medicine and should be used ONLY as directed by your doctor. Follow your doctor's instructions about how to take, when to take, and how long to take LUNESTA.
2. Never use LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for longer than directed by your doctor.
3. If you notice any unusual and/or disturbing thoughts or behavior during treatment with LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, contact your doctor.
4. Tell your doctor about any medicines you may be taking, including medicines you may buy without a prescription and herbal preparations. You should also tell your doctor if you drink alcohol. DO NOT use alcohol while taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
5. Do not take LUNESTA unless you are able to get 8 or more hours of sleep before you must be active again.
6. Do not increase the prescribed dose of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine unless instructed by your doctor.
7. When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
8. Be aware that you may have more sleeping problems the first night or two after stopping any sleep medicine.
9. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, if you become pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding a baby while taking LUNESTA.
10. As with all prescription medicines, never share LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine with anyone else. Always store LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine in the original container and out of reach of children.
11. Be sure to tell your doctor if you suffer from depression.
12. LUNESTA works very quickly. You should only take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed.
13. For LUNESTA to work best, you should not take it with or immediately after a high-fat, heavy meal.
14. Some people, such as older adults (i.e., ages 65 and over) and people with liver disease, should start with the lower dose (1 mg) of LUNESTA. Your doctor may choose to start therapy at 2 mg. In general, adults under age 65 should be treated with 2 or 3 mg.
15. Each tablet is a single dose; do not crush or break the tablet.

Note: This summary provides important information about LUNESTA. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the Prescribing Information and then discuss it with him or her.

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bin Mahfouz in an American federal court, seeking to block the enforcement of the foreign judgment against her on the ground that it violated her First Amendment rights. "The Saudis are using their wealth to intimidate people from writing about them," Ehrenfeld said. "I thought it was time to fight back." (Her legal fees already amount to approximately two hundred thousand dollars.)

The bin Mahfouz family maintains a Web site (www.binmahfouz.info) largely devoted to recounting its various lawsuits, most of them filed in England, against journalists around the world. (The site does not note that Khalid bin Mahfouz, who held a thirty-per-cent ownership share of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, or BCCI, paid a settlement of almost a quarter of a billion dollars after the bank's notorious collapse.) "Khalid bin Mahfouz has publicly condemned terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations," Timothy Finn, one of his Washington, D.C., lawyers, said the other day. "And he categorically denies that he has ever provided any assistance or financial support to any terrorist organization." Finn has asked Judge Richard C. Casey, of the federal district court in Manhattan, to throw the case out on the ground that his client has no ties to New York, and that since bin Mahfouz hasn't tried to enforce the British judgment here, there is no live controversy to decide.

Ehrenfeld earns a living by piecing together teaching stints, think-tank assignments, and book deals. "I am working on a new project about how the Saudis are using their money to penetrate the Western and U.S. economies in a strategic way," she said. "This is financial jihad." But she hasn't had much time to spend on the new book this summer. "I'm not reporting," she said last week. "I'm doing fund-raising to pay my lawyers."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

DEPT. OF SMALL TALK
CROSSTOWN BUS

Among the passengers the other afternoon on the Ninety-sixth Street crosstown bus was a young black man in bluejeans and a white T-shirt. He wore a black brimmed hat, with earflaps that were pulled down over his ears, despite the heat. He was thin to the point of being scrawny. His narrow shoulders swayed as he walked up the aisle. He had a large gold chain around his neck. His teeth were slightly bucked. He took a seat and looked around, smiling. Clearly he belonged to the tribe of extroverts. The eyes of the woman across the aisle from him were fixed steadily on her paper. The man next to her scrolled through messages on his cell phone. Beside him, a little boy laid his head in the lap of his sitter. The young man slumped in his seat. He spread his long legs. His head bobbed slightly.

At the next stop, a young Latina woman came walking down the aisle. She was wearing a sleeveless green dress and her hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She carried a handbag with a pattern of flowers on it. Wires from the bag led to little earplugs. The expression on her face was remote. The young man occupied an outside seat. The seat next to him was one of the last left vacant. The young woman stopped beside him, a gift from life, and he looked at her and jumped briskly to his feet, then stepped aside to allow her to sit by the window.

She placed the handbag on her lap and looked straight ahead. The young man tilted his head and nodded several times. "Got your music," he said.

The young woman looked at him and smiled politely but briefly, then she returned to staring straight ahead.

The young man touched the brim of his hat. He smiled. "What're you listening to?" he said.

The young woman said something quietly, which gave him the opportunity to lean closer to her. "Barkley," he said.

The young woman shook her head.

"Barkley, he's a basketball player. I didn't think you could be listening to Barkley." His smile was lavish and sympathetic, indicating that he was glad they had sorted out their misunderstanding. "Barkley didn't make no recordings, far as I know," he said. His remarks were addressed mainly to the side of her head. "He likes to talk a lot, but, see, he just plays ball, and don't even do that no more. Unh-uh."

The young woman turned halfway toward him and smiled, but the smile was brief and made no commitment.

The young man asked again what she was listening to. Her reply was barely audible. "Old Day?" he said. "I don't know Old Day. Must be some new kind of thing. Have to find out about Old Day." He leaned in. "I might like to know about Old Day," he said.

The young woman smiled again. She changed the position of her hands on her bag.

An idea seemed to occur to him. "How about you tell me about Old Day," he said. He put one hand under his chin and the other under his elbow, as if he were being judicious and patient in awaiting her reply.

The young woman smiled again and shook her head.

"Don't be stingy with Old Day," he said. "Share Old Day."

The young woman turned toward him and shook her head. She said something quietly.

The young man said, "How's that?"

"Coldplay," she said. "Not Old Day, Coldplay." She looked down at her bag and seemed to blush.

"Coldplay, then," the young man said. "I'd definitely like to know about Coldplay. How about you teach me about Coldplay."

The young woman lowered her head once again and smiled, but she said no.

The young man tapped his ear several times. "Come on," he said. "Share Coldplay. Let me hear some sounds." He smiled broadly. The young woman removed one of her earplugs and said, not unkindly, "No."

The young man sat back. "Oh, it's like that," he said. He nodded. He tugged the brim of his hat. He looked out the window. "I'm going to have to learn about Coldplay on my own," he said.

He faced forward and rested his hands on his knees. The bus stopped and the young woman turned toward him with one hand on the back of the seat in front of her, and he rose and stepped to the side with a courtly, scarecrowlike elegance. Then he sat down again and stared straight ahead.

—*Alec Wilkinson*

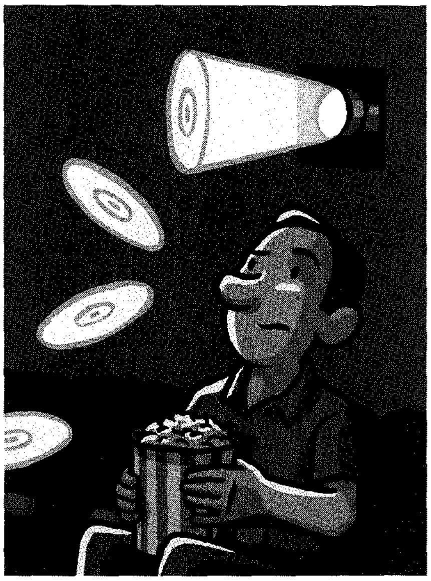
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
DISK AVERSE

In 1918, the movie business found itself in crisis. Moviegoers, who, increasingly, were more educated and more middle-class, had been growing bored with the crude, melodramatic shorts of the day. "Neither the producers nor the theatres are making money, and the critics are justly condemning most of the current films," *Photoplay* commented. "The producer . . . is not producing good enough pictures. Unless he does so, and does so promptly, the movie business cannot hope long to endure." But in the following years, thanks to directors like Chaplin, Griffith, and DeMille, increasingly sophisticated films propelled audiences back into theatres. What had looked like the death of Hollywood was what we now think of as its birth.

Nearly ninety years later, theatre attendance is tumbling again, audiences and critics are disgruntled, and each new week brings a lament about the feeble box-office and a postmortem for some surefire hit that no one came to see. Last week, the total box-office take was down seven per cent from the previous year, and the one would-be blockbuster, Michael Bay's "The Island," bombed, bringing in a pathetic twelve million dollars. In other words, there couldn't be a better time for Hollywood to once more reinvent itself.

In some ways, that reinvention is already under way. As Edward Jay Epstein explains in his new book about the economics of Hollywood, "The Big Picture," in 1947 box-office receipts accounted for ninety-five per cent of the studios' revenue; today, they account for less than a fifth. The key to this transformation is the DVD, one of the most lucrative innovations in Hollywood since the introduction of sound. Unlike videotapes, their predecessors, DVDs have remarkably high profit margins—they're cheap to make, and people buy them rather than just renting them. The DVD, then, has changed the way the studios make money. But it has only started to change the movies they make.

Hollywood's basic strategy is a familiar one: invest a huge amount of money in films that have the potential to be blockbusters, target teen-agers as a core audience, and spend enormous amounts of energy and money trying to get people to the theatre on the first weekend. This is a high-risk, high-reward strategy, and it can work, but it makes less sense in a world in which DVDs are the main source of revenue. While many blockbusters do very well on DVD, they generally make less that way than at the box office. Instead, the weekly lists of DVDs are full of movies that Hollywood has traditionally considered mediocre performers—small-to-mid-budget comedies, horror films, and dramas, like "Friday Night Lights," "The Notebook," and "Hide and Seek." Unlike blockbusters, these movies often earn more from DVD sales than at the box office. The bio-pic "Ray," for instance, earned seventy-five million in the theatre but a hundred and twenty million in DVD sales.



In recent weeks, business pages have been full of dire predictions about slowing DVD sales, based mainly on news that the numbers for "Shrek 2" and "The Incredibles" came in well below expectations. But while there's some evidence that the performance of the biggest hits appears to be slumping (though only slightly), smaller movies are picking up the slack: over-all sales are still rising briskly. This year, they are on a pace to top twenty billion dollars.

What's becoming increasingly clear is that the people who buy DVDs are, for the most part, not the people who go to the movies on opening weekend. According to research from Fox Home Entertainment, DVD buyers tend to be older than your typical theatregoer. More of them are women, and most of them don't see movies in theatres before buying them. Most important, the new DVD audience is so diverse that companies can target niche markets and still sell millions of disks. Because specialized markets are more predictable, the risk of failure is much lower, and so small-to-mid-budget movies can be very profitable indeed. In the U.S., a big-budget epic like "Troy" may have earned nearly twice as much money at the box office as "Ray" did, but, once DVD sales are included, that ratio drops to just 1.2 to 1. And, once you take into account the difference in production and marketing costs, "Ray," a far cheaper film to make, starts to look like a truly excellent investment.

The rise of the DVD, then, should allow Hollywood to spend less and make more. The last couple of weeks have provided a perfect case in point. The Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn vehicle "Wedding Crashers" did not seek out a mainstream audience (it's rated "R") and was made relatively cheaply. It did very well at the box office and will do even better on DVD, to go by the performance of similar comedies, like "Old School" and "Dodgeball." "The Island," by contrast, cost about a hundred and twenty million to make, flopped at the box office, and, if it's like most big-budget flops—"Hulk," say—will struggle to do well on DVD.

It will be hard, of course, for Hollywood to break itself of the habit of fetishizing opening weekends, but some studios seem to have done it, most notably New Line Cinema (which made "Wedding Crashers"). Over the past four years, the company has flourished by combining lots of small- and mid-budget movies—including DVD hits like "The Notebook," and "Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle"—with one big "tent-pole" investment ("The Lord of the Rings"). Over time, other studios are bound to adopt similar strategies. Selling disks through Wal-Mart will always lack the glamour of a première at Grauman's. But, as Hollywood learned back in 1918, it sure beats working for a living.

—*James Surowiecki*

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ANNALS OF POLITICS

MINORITY RETORT

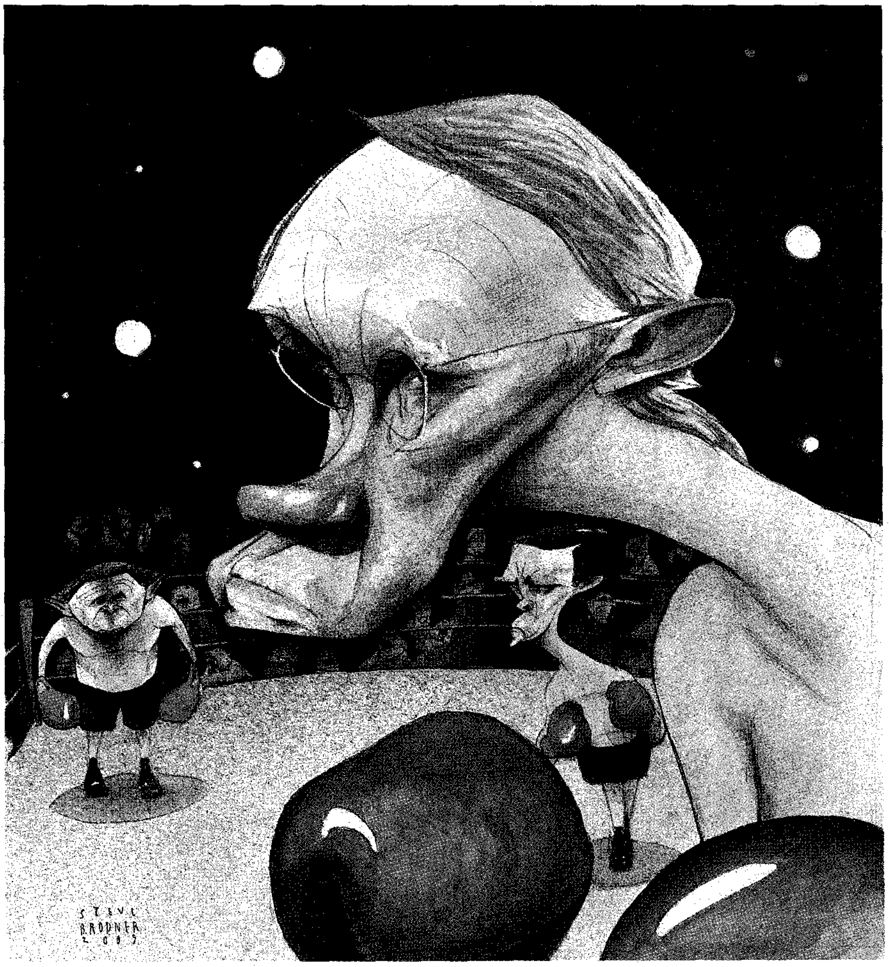
How a pro-gun, anti-abortion Nevadan leads the Senate's Democrats.

BY ELSA WALSH

About twenty minutes before President Bush announced that John G. Roberts, Jr., was his choice to replace Sandra Day O'Connor on the Supreme Court, he telephoned Harry Reid, of Nevada, the Senate Minority Leader. As Reid recalls the brief conversation, Bush said, "This guy is really smart, and you'll like him." Reid replied, "I hope so," and added that, during the search, he had enjoyed working with the White House legal counsel, Harriet Miers. (A few days earlier, Reid had met with Miers and had suggested ways to avoid a divisive confirmation process.) Mentioning her name, Reid said, was a signal—his way of telling Bush, "Thanks for not giving us any of these crazies." Or, as he put it a little later, the President "didn't give us somebody who people like me were jumping up and down screaming the first time the name was uttered."

Reid has been the Democrats' leader in the Senate for six months. He is sixty-five, a trim man with short, graying hair and slightly stooped shoulders, and not someone who appears likely to jump up and down screaming. When we met last week in his Capitol office, it was clear that the Roberts nomination had come as a relief. "There were lots of people we didn't want, and I made sure he knew what those names were," Reid said, and mentioned the federal judges Edith Jones and Janice Rogers Brown, among others. "I think the President submitted someone who he thinks won't be much trouble." Nonetheless, Reid was reserving judgment until the F.B.I. investigation and the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings were completed. "Roberts is not a slam dunk," he said. "I'm just keeping, as some have heard me say, my powder dry until we find out what the deal is." And yet he couldn't quite conceal his pleasure.

The day after Bush made his choice public, Roberts went to Capitol Hill to meet with some of the senators who will eventually be asked to vote on his confirmation. Reid, who is a former trial lawyer, spent thirty minutes with Roberts. One thing he asked him was how he felt about Supreme Court precedents—in particular, on what grounds they might be overturned. "Precedent is so important to me in the law," Reid told him.



The Senate filibuster deal was seen as a victory for Harry Reid over Bill Frist.

STEVE BRODNER

Roberts, Reid recalled, said, " 'Oh, on the Supreme Court you can change precedent only if there's this and this,' and he was rattling them off. I hope I didn't act surprised, but I'd never heard anything like that before." Roberts, in Reid's view, left no doubt that he would be very reluctant to overturn precedents. To do so, Roberts had said, the Court would first have to consider a series of objective criteria, two of which stood out: whether a precedent fostered stability in the nation; and the extent to which society had come to rely on an earlier ruling, even a dubious one. "I thought it would be more of a weaselly answer than that, but he said you have to meet all these standards before you can change a precedent," Reid said. Roberts's view of precedent is likely to be an important issue during the upcoming confirmation hearings. Earl Maltz, a conservative and a professor at the Rutgers University School of Law at Camden, says that what Roberts told Reid could be "very significant," because it runs counter to the "originalist" approach of Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, who believe that the Constitution should be strictly interpreted, according to the original intent of the Founding Fathers; on that premise, some previously decided cases, including Roe v. Wade, would be ripe for overturning. "The Constitution is not a living organism," Scalia has said.

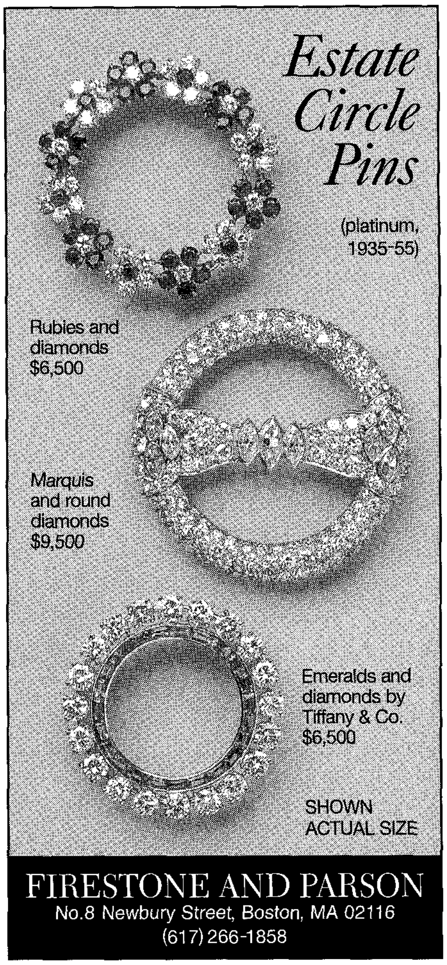
The other important part of their conversation, as Reid recounted it, had to do with an environmental case that Roberts had successfully argued before the Supreme Court in 2002—"one of the biggest environmental victories in decades," Reid said. As a private attorney, Roberts had represented the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, which had been sued for imposing a building moratorium in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Under questioning by the Justices, Roberts had cited the potential for "irreparable harm" to the lake, and at one point said, "A temporary ban on development doesn't render property valueless." The environment is one of Reid's causes, and what impressed Reid was that Roberts's argument had been reasoned, not doctrinaire—"He based it on the facts." Reid felt that the case demonstrated Roberts's ability to grasp both sides of a debate.

Reid more than once compared Roberts to Justice David Souter, who was appointed by the first President Bush, in 1990, and today is widely detested by conservatives because he frequently sides with the more liberal Justices. Souter and Reid are friendly. "He's my favorite man on the Court," Reid said. "I think he's such a wonderful man, and he believes in precedent. That's all he's doing. He's just following the law." Reid smiled, and continued, "If somebody is a real lawyer and not a Clarence Thomas or Edith Jones, who is there not to be a judge but to be a legislator, it gives us some hope, and so, if he is approved, I would hope he would turn out like Souter or somebody like that." There is, to be sure, little in Roberts's early record to suggest that he is anything but a conservative. A Washington *Post* report last week, for instance, quoted documents suggesting that Roberts had been an aggressive advocate of Ronald Reagan's agenda when he served as a special assistant to Attorney General William French Smith.

Reid, though, believes that Bush chose Roberts in a moment of political weakness. Two months earlier, the Democrats had been successful in beating back the so-called "nuclear option"—Senator Trent Lott's infelicitous name for the Republican attempt to change long-standing Senate rules on the filibuster. That issue had occupied the Senate for months, and for good reason: Republicans have a ten-vote advantage in the hundred-member Senate, but it requires sixty votes to stop a filibuster; the Republican leadership wanted to change that to a simple majority of fifty-one votes, which would have made it almost impossible for the Democrats to block a controversial Supreme Court nomination. "I don't want to stick my finger in his eye, at this stage," Reid said, speaking of Bush. "I'm trying, in a nice way, to say I think everyone's experience here with the nuclear option has made everyone, including the President, more cautious about judges, because, as it turned out, we spent a third of the Senate's time so far this year basically on it." The filibuster issue was finally resolved by means of a complex bargain worked out by a group of centrist Republicans and Democrats, who became known as the Gang of Fourteen. In the end, the filibuster was preserved. The result was widely seen as a victory for Reid and a setback for his counterpart, Majority Leader Bill Frist, of Tennessee.

After that, Reid said, Bush "just didn't need another fight." He added, "He's had plenty." He pointed to a drop in Bush's approval rating, and cited a recent *Wall Street Journal* / NBC News poll in which only forty-one per cent of the respondents said they believed that Bush was honest and straightforward. Reid attributed the President's declining popularity to bad news from Iraq, the investigation into whether his key political adviser, Karl Rove, leaked the name of an undercover C.I.A. agent, and his proposal, now faltering, to privatize part of Social Security. "He's always been king of the hill," Reid said. "His numbers have been good, but they're not good now." Reid also thought that Bush had come to have a different view of him. "I just don't think he estimated me at all—under or over." Now, Reid said, "I think he understands me a little bit more than he used to."

This spring, I went to see Reid in Nevada, which he has represented in Washington since 1983, in the House of Representatives for two terms and, since 1987, in the Senate. Outside his home state, or the orbit of the United States Capitol, though, he is not widely known. During one stop, Reid called around the country to some committed Democratic donors. In two out of three calls, he had to identify himself several times before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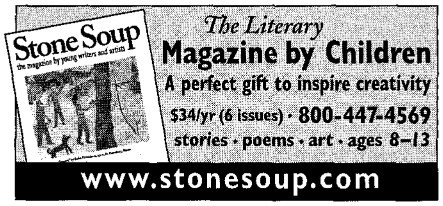
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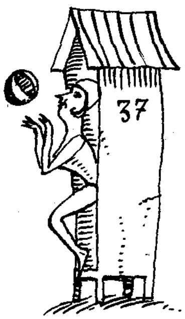
the recipient figured out who he was. "This is Harry Reid." Pause. "I'm a U.S. senator." Pause. "Harry Reid. I'm the Senate Minority Leader. Harry R-E-I-D." When he hung up, he turned to me and said, "I guess I'm not too well known in that household."

In Nevada, a state where the federal government owns nearly ninety per cent of the land and politics can be incestuous, Reid's power and influence are widespread. He was embarrassed two years ago when a Los Angeles *Times* story revealed that one of his sons and his son-in-law had lobbied in Washington for "companies, trade groups and municipalities seeking Reid's help in the Senate." Over the previous four years, the newspaper reported, these efforts, supported by Reid, brought more than two million dollars in business to firms that employed family members. At the time, Reid's four sons, ranging in age from thirty to forty-two, worked for Nevada's largest law firm, Lionel Sawyer & Collins. The story noted that the Howard Hughes Corporation alone "paid $300,000 to the tiny Washington consulting firm of [Reid's] son-in-law Steven Barringer to push a provision allowing the company to acquire 998 acres of federal land ripe for development" in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. When I asked Reid about the L.A. *Times* story, he pointed out that his son-in-law had been a lobbyist before his daughter married him. Susan McCue, Reid's chief of staff, said in an e-mail that when the newspaper started making inquiries "Senator Reid (and I) agreed that we needed to put up a wall between any family members lobbying and this office for the sake of appearances, even if they're working on issues that benefit Nevada." Soon after he was interviewed by L.A. *Times* reporters, Reid banned relatives from lobbying his office.



Reid seems, at first, an unlikely choice for party leader in the Senate, especially given the tradition of men like Lyndon Johnson, whose method of leadership was to cajole and threaten his colleagues. Reid doesn't have the sort of domineering personality that L.B.J. had; in fact, despite an occasionally quick temper, he can seem almost shy. But, if Reid is no Johnson, he has, unlike his immediate predecessor, Tom Daschle, of South Dakota, or Frist, been able to keep his party largely united. That is due, in part, to his attentiveness; he is in constant contact with colleagues, and even reserves a pocket in his suit for their written requests. Susan McCue says that Reid is always assessing a person's vulnerabilities in order to "disarm, to endear, to threaten, but most of all to instill fear." And Reid has made it plain that there are consequences for stepping out of line. Without Reid's approval, Senator Byron Dorgan, of North Dakota, who was making a bid to chair the Democratic National Committee, announced that he had Reid's support. Reid—a friend of Dorgan's—promptly and publicly withdrew his backing.

Like L.B.J. and other Southwestern politicians, such as Barry Goldwater, Reid has a habit of using language that his critics say is inappropriate for a Senate leader. "I think Senator Reid often says what we're all thinking but perhaps are afraid to say," Senator Edward Kennedy says. Reid has called Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve chairman, a "political hack," said that Clarence Thomas was an "embarrassment," and labelled Bush a "loser" and a "liar." He surprised the Democratic operative Jim Johnson, who was conducting John Kerry's search for a running mate, by sharply criticizing a long list of potential candidates, including John Edwards.

In public presentations, Reid is sometimes barely audible, which forces his spokesman to stand very close to him to hear what he says. In his haste to finish a speech, he sometimes mangles the text, and he is not much liked by television—he suffers from a certain charisma gap. When I asked him one day which former Senate leader he most admired, he mentioned Mike Mansfield, of Montana, who was the Majority Leader from 1961 to 1977. "He hated going on programs like 'Meet the Press,' and he was so bad they eventually hated having him on," he said. Yet the aversion to television also works to Reid's advantage. As former Senator John Breaux, Democrat of Louisiana, says, "It's easier for an elected official like Harry to be more trusted and accepted by his colleagues if they don't think that he's out in front trying to do it for the media."

To most politicians, this kind of anonymity would be torment. But Reid is not aspiring to be the face of the Democratic Party, or even its voice. "I know my limitations," he said, and added, "I haven't gotten where I am by my good looks, my athletic ability, my great brain, my oratorical skills." Reid is a Mormon, and differs with most of his Democratic colleagues on social issues. He is opposed to abortion, gay marriage, and gun control, and supports the death penalty. He voted for both Persian Gulf wars. At a time when the White House and Congress are controlled by Republicans, Reid's essential role is defensive—to hold the line for his party when the Bush agenda threatens to trample what Democrats most value. And, despite his relative anonymity, Reid has certainly been noticed by conservatives. When the Senate finally reached a deal on the filibuster, James Dobson, the ultraconservative chairman of Focus on the Family, delivered a backhanded compliment to Reid. "This Senate agreement represents a complete bailout and betrayal by a cabal of Republicans and a great victory for united Democrats," Dobson said.

When Reid talks to constituents, he likes to single out staffers for particular praise. He told a group of Las Vegas businessmen that Susan McCue was one of ten children and that "she worked like a dog to get through college." McCue, who is thirty-nine, and has worked intermittently for Reid since 1990, rolled her eyes at Reid's description. When Reid speaks about Bush, his tone changes; he has called Bush "King George," and in Las Vegas he told a group of community activists that the President's view was "If you're poor it's your fault. Go out and be part of America's success. Go out and get a job and be rich." And he added, "I wish it were so." When I asked McCue about this apparent class sensitivity, she said, "It's not resentment on Reid's part. But he knows they"—Reid and Bush—"are from different sides of the track." She urged me to visit Searchlight, Nevada, where Reid was born and has a home—a place that does double duty as a political backdrop, evoking the authentic Old West.

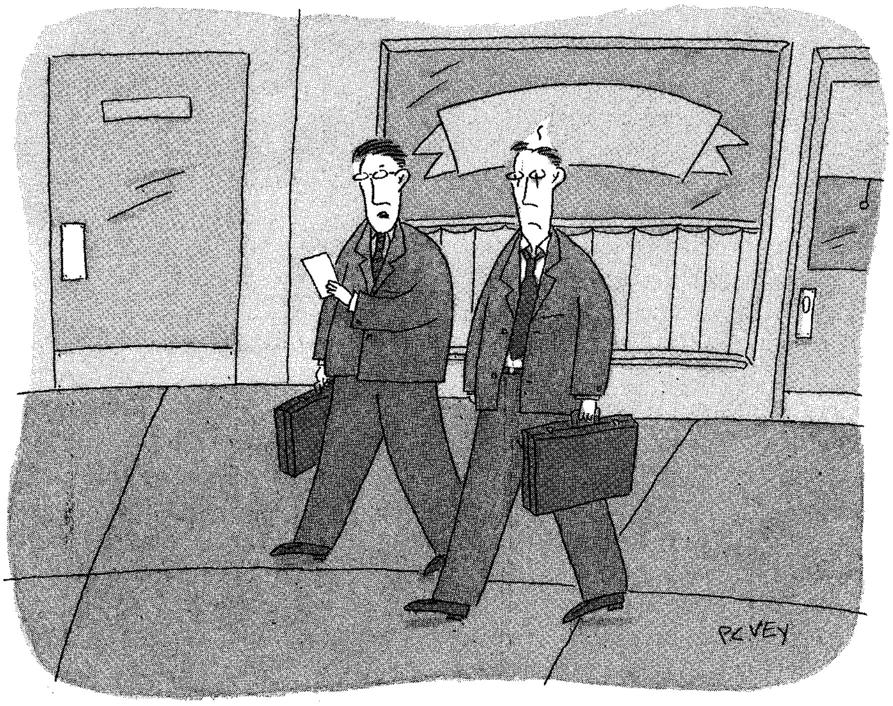
Seven years ago, Reid wrote a history of his home town, "Searchlight: The Camp That Didn't Fail," published by the University of Nevada, in which he observed, "There are no permanent towns that survive on mining alone. When the tide goes out, when the boom is over, the debris is all that is left. . . . When the town fades, those with money, talent, and initiative generally depart quickly, leaving behind the diehards, the outcasts, the mavericks, or those too old or too sick to move on." Today in Searchlight, which is about a mile long, one can see the two-room cinder-block schoolhouse that Reid attended, a small casino on the main street, and a McDonald's. Almost all the houses are double-wide mobile homes, with no landscaping.

There were about two hundred people left in the town when Reid was born, in 1939, the third of four sons of Harry Reid, Sr., a gold miner with an elementary-school education, and his wife, Inez, who did laundry for some of the local bordellos, which were by then the town's primary business. Reid's boyhood home was built out of scavenged railroad ties; it had no indoor toilet and no hot water. There were no telephones in Searchlight until the nineteen-fifties. When Reid's younger brother, Larry, broke a leg in a bicycle accident, the leg was never set. "We didn't go to doctors in those days unless it was a matter of life and death," Reid said. "And he just lay there. It was so painful, and you couldn't touch the bed. And that's the way it just was for several days." (Larry and another brother are retired; the third, an alcoholic, died in 1977.) Reid's parents drank and his father often got into brawls. "He didn't like people coming around and wouldn't let us answer the door even if we were home," Reid said. When he could no longer work, because of silicosis, a miner's cough, Reid's father stopped drinking, but at the age of fifty-eight he committed suicide, with a gunshot to the head. "He was always depressed," Reid said, adding that his father's depression was evident to him only in hindsight. "We always joke that Dad sobered up and killed himself." His mother tacked to the wall a blue pillowcase with gold fringe and a message of perseverance that originated with Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "We can. We will. We must."

Because the school in Searchlight went only up to eighth grade, every week Reid hitchhiked forty miles to Henderson, a factory town, where he boarded with relatives while he went to the public high school. "I always knew I wanted to get out of there," he said of Searchlight. "I knew that from the time I was a little kid." In Henderson, Reid met Landra Gould, the woman whom he eventually married. Reid said that Gould's parents, who were Jewish, liked him until they realized how serious the couple was—"They wanted their daughter to marry a Jewish boy"—and tried to end the relationship. Her father, Landra Reid told me, "would tear up Harry's letters, hang up the phone on him. They had a fight in the front yard." Reid has said that the fight ended when he knocked his future father-in-law, a chiropractor, to the ground. Landra says, "I remember a lot of yelling and pushing." In 1959, when Harry was twenty and Landra was nineteen, they eloped. After a honeymoon dinner at a Chinese restaurant in Las Vegas, Landra called home to report the news; within days, she got a letter from her parents saying that, despite their misgivings, their daughter's happiness came first. Reid now wears his father-in-law's ring.

In Henderson, Reid also met Donal (Mike) O'Callaghan, who arrived at the high school to teach government and boxing. O'Callaghan, who had lost a leg in the Korean War and was just ten years older than Reid, became a hero to Reid after he faced down a school bully. Reid, a catcher on the school's championship baseball team and a guard on the football team, learned to box from O'Callaghan, who helped him win a partial athletic scholarship to a junior college in Utah and later helped pay his way through law school. O'Callaghan, like Reid, had larger ambitions: in the seventies, he served two terms as governor of Nevada, and he went on to become the executive editor of the Las Vegas *Sun* and a sometime columnist for the paper. When he died, last year, Reid eulogized him as the best friend he had ever had. McCue told me that the only time she ever saw Reid cry was at the news of O'Callaghan's death.

While Harry was in college, he and Landra converted to Mormonism. "The thing that was so impressive to me—in addition to the spiritual aspects that I'd never experienced before—was the emphasis on family," Reid said. "The biggest jump for me," Landra Reid said, "was to try to understand the connection between Judaism and the Old Testament and the New Testament, and how to make any sense of how Christianity fit



"You're right—they did charge you for the Heimlich maneuver."

• •

into it." She added, "Before we got married, we had talked about it and decided we were not going to let religion divide us after what we'd been through. If we found something, we were going to find it together." Until both of her parents died, Harry Reid said, the family observed the Jewish holidays. "My two oldest children have great affection for things Jewish, and my three younger children are aware of their mother's lineage, and all of them are very proud of the fact that they are eligible for Israeli citizenship." On the doorway of their house in Searchlight, the Reids have a mezuzah.

The Reids' house, a Mediterranean-style two-bedroom home that faces the open desert, is situated on a hundred acres at the end of a long dirt road. They had it built four years ago, after living for years in a double-wide. Reid's friend Jay Brown, a Las Vegas lawyer and a Brooklyn native, said, "You should have seen the trailer," and complained that simply getting there ruined the tires of his car. Reid is a former marathoner—he ran twelve races before an injury and then a fall sidelined him. Now he takes an hour-long walk each morning, often with Landra, whose presence appears to put him in a lighter mood.

The Reids took me on a tour of the house, which is decorated in a Western mining motif, including a gate from one of the town's mines that hangs on a wall in the entry hall. Next to it is an abstract oil painting of Martin Luther King, Jr. Reid showed me his high-school yearbook; when he was sixteen, his nickname was Pinky. A painting of what appeared to be a mountain man with a white scraggly beard caught my attention. "That's my brother Larry," he said. "He still looks that way." He pointed to a skeletal structure in the distance, the remains of one of the mines where his father worked.

APPROACHING NEW YORK CITY

Gray wastescape
by midday
glare, a sort of
empty refrigerator light
everywhere—

Approach to New York through the South Bronx, vast
hives of home to the world
of death and breath, just like anyplace else
but different: the White House of God, maybe; mother-
like mountains or statues . . .

On the night Greyhound:
once in loose-fitting hospital gown you approached
and pushing the I.V.-stand before you down the aisle
stopped at my seat without looking down, startling me awake.
(And white roses rapidly spreading like cold flames, over your eyelids, the endlessly uttered white petals.)

Approaching New York City
signifies, primarily, approaching you—always
has, your face
like the sky it is everywhere, at every
turn, though you're a prisoner of Not today

and taken far from me.
But I am on my way,

one way or another I will
come knocking as so many times before,
I won't be long:
oh I will once again
belong, I know it.

—*Franz Wright*

As George W. Bush has learned, Harry Reid does not ignore slights. "I believe in vengeance," he once told a reporter. In May, he began a commencement address at George Washington University Law School by saying that the last time he had set foot on the campus was January, 1964—the year he graduated from the school. "I've been holding a grudge," he said. Law school was difficult. "We managed to get by, but just barely," he said. At one point, while Landra was pregnant with their second child and he was working six days a week as a Capitol police officer, the transmission of their car, a 1954 Buick Special, broke down. He was desperate. "No car," he continued. "No way to get to work. Too many bills." When he approached a dean for help, he recalled, the dean said, " 'Why don't you just quit law school?' I don't remember exactly what I thought he would say, but that was not it," he said. "Since that day, I've harbored ill will toward this school."

Reid told the graduates that he regretted his pettiness, but it's fair to say that payback has been a factor in his career. When I asked what got him interested in politics, he had a one-word reply: "Rudeness." He explained that not long after he returned to Henderson to practice law, a client, a doctor, had asked him to accompany him to an administrative hearing at a hospital. "As we walked in, the chairman of the board of trustees said, 'We don't need lawyers here. We do what we want to do,' " Reid recalled. "It was just so rude. I wasn't there to say anything. I was there just to watch. As a result of how rude he was, I decided to run for the hospital board." He was elected in 1966, and not long afterward, he said, "we got him"—the administrator—"fired." Soon, Reid decided that he could accomplish more in the state assembly, and in 1968 he announced his candidacy. This time, he went after the telephone company. "Service was so bad then, and they were dumb enough to respond to me,” Reid has said. “So I had an issue.” Reid served in the assembly for only two years, but he acquired a reputation as a consumer advocate, and he still holds the Nevada record for introducing the most bills in a session.

In 1970, Reid was barely thirty, and preparing for another state run, when it was suggested that he enter the lieutenant governor’s race. His good friend Mike O’Callaghan was running for governor as a Democrat—a long-shot candidacy—and Reid decided to run, he says, “within fifteen minutes.” His law partners gave him a party, and, as Reid tells it, “one of the local columnists wrote that I must be supported by Howard Hughes—otherwise how could I have a big party like that. Howard Hughes had just come to town. Of course it wasn’t true, but who was I to deny that he was helping me?”

Reid believes that the pseudo-Hughes connection may have frightened off challengers, and both O’Callaghan and Reid, running separately, won. But success, he says, made him overconfident. Reid had been lieutenant governor for four years when Senator Alan Bible announced his retirement. “I was a shoo-in,” Reid says. “Everything was in my favor. But I was young and impulsive and I attacked everybody. Every day, we would get up and find out who we were going to attack that day.” His pollster was Pat Cadell, who went on to work for Jimmy Carter’s Presidential campaign in 1976. Cadell assured him that he couldn’t lose. “I showed him,” Reid says. “I lost by six hundred and twenty-four votes,” to Paul Laxalt. When friends told him that such reverses always turn out for the best, he said, “I wanted to kick them in the shins.”

In 1977, O’Callaghan appointed him to the chairmanship of the Nevada Gaming Commission, which oversees casinos, and that was an experience that made his other work look easy. Before Reid took the job, O’Callaghan introduced him to the outgoing chairman, Peter Echeverria. “Pete was telling us, ‘I’ve had people out here watching me, these gangsters,’ and he said, ‘I think they’ve tapped my phone,’ ” Reid recalled. “I thought he was making all this stuff up. It just didn’t make sense. I had no concept of the Mob. It meant nothing to me.” There had been a decrease in Mob activity, but organized crime was again investing in Las Vegas, and for four years Reid confronted wiseguys like Tony (the Ant) Spilotro, who had been sent to Las Vegas by a Chicago branch of La Cosa Nostra, “the Outfit,” and was known for killing his victims by squeezing their heads in a vise. In 1979, Reid barred Spilotro from all casinos.

In July of 1978, a man named Jack Gordon, who was later married to LaToya Jackson, offered Reid twelve thousand dollars to approve two new, carnival-like gaming devices for casino use. Reid reported the attempted bribe to the F.B.I. and arranged a meeting with Gordon in his office. By agreement, F.B.I. agents burst in to arrest Gordon at the point where Reid asked, “Is this the money?” Although he was taking part in a sting, Reid was unable to control his temper; the videotape shows him getting up from his chair and saying, “You son of a bitch, you tried to bribe me!” and attempting to choke Gordon, before startled agents pulled him off. “I was so angry with him for thinking he could bribe me,” Reid said, explaining his theatrical outburst. Gordon was convicted in federal court in 1979 and sentenced to six months in prison.

One day in 1981, Landra Reid noticed that the family station wagon was not running properly, and she discovered a cable under the hood and “something” sticking out of the gas tank. Police found a device that would have exploded had it been correctly grounded. Reid always blamed Gordon for the bomb, and the incident frightened his family—by then there were five children, four sons and a daughter—so that for a year they started the car by remote control. Gordon died in April, at the age of sixty-six, and his connection to the bombing attempt was never proved. McCue, Reid’s chief of staff, says that the episode changed Reid. Whatever the issue, she says, his approach is always “No one is going to kill me over this.”

When Reid’s Gaming Commission appointment expired, in 1981, he went back to private practice. He was at work on a liability lawsuit stemming from the M-G-M Grand fire, the 1980 blaze in which eighty-four people died, when Nevada was given another seat in the House of Representatives. Reid ran as a New Democrat, in a state that was tilting Republican. “Part of it, I’m sure, was my narrow loss in the Senate race, and it was also to show people I could make a comeback,” Reid said of his desire to run. He won the election and went to Washington in 1983.

After visiting Searchlight, Reid and I drove to Las Vegas, fifty-five miles away, through the Mojave Desert. On the drive, he talked about his relationship with Bush, whom he regularly disparages; there appears to be no chance that Reid and Bush will duplicate the unusually friendly relationship that Ronald Reagan had with Thomas P. (Tip) O’Neill, the Democratic Speaker of the House, or even the businesslike partnership between Speaker Sam Rayburn and President Eisenhower. At an appearance at the Doris Hancock Elementary School, in Las Vegas, which some of his children attended, Reid began by talking about how his life had become more pressured since he’d become Minority Leader, but he was soon asked about Bush. “I didn’t come here to beat up on President Bush,” he said. “But I have served three Republican Presidents. President Reagan—I cared a great deal for him, and he got most of what he wanted. If you disagreed with him, he did not hold it against you.” He went on, “President Bush No. 1 is such a nice person. Some of my most prized possessions are the three letters he wrote me. But this President is totally different. He takes after his mother. It’s either his way or no way. It’s very, very difficult.” Even Reid seemed surprised by the depth of his reaction. “I’m sorry to give you this report on President Bush,” he said, “but that’s how I feel.”

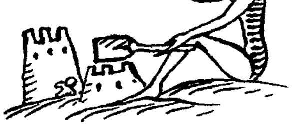
Reid had been head of the school P.T.A., and the parents of some of his children’s friends were in the audience. One was the mother of a college roommate of one of his sons. Like Reid, she is an observant Mormon and they were old friends; but she was a Republican and clearly upset that Reid did not support Bush, especially on the partial privatization of Social Security. Later, she told me that she had voted for Reid in every election except the last one. “He became too liberal,” she said. “I love his wife, but I feel he’s left a lot of his beliefs behind.” While we were talking, Reid approached and she told him that one of her son’s friends, a professional football player, had been at the White House on Valentine's Day. "They said Bush was so nice," she said. Reid raised his eyebrows.

What happened between him and Bush? Their first meetings, right after Bush's 2000 election, were cordial enough, Reid told me. "He was an extremely personable man—the kind of guy you'd like to go to a ballgame with." But, he went on, "I have a lot of history now that I didn't have then. First of all, he started out on a real bad foot with me because of Yucca Mountain"—a site a hundred miles northwest of Las Vegas, which the federal government wants to use as long-term storage for tens of thousands of tons of radioactive waste. Al Gore opposed this plan in the 2000 campaign, and Bush seemed to oppose it as well, promising that he would base any decision on "sound science." Reid believed Bush, but, he said, "my belief was short-lived." Barely a year into his first term, Bush approved the project, and Reid accused him of lying: "I thought he had misled the people of Nevada on nuclear waste." Of calling Bush a liar, Reid said, "If somebody doesn't tell the truth, how else would you describe it? I guess I could have said he didn't tell the truth." Reid said that, in a private meeting in the Oval Office in February, 2002, he told Bush, "You sold out on this." The *Wall Street Journal* later reported the Yucca Mountain decision as the "biggest defeat" of Reid's career, but added, "The fact that the campaign went on for so long is testimony to Mr. Reid's formidable persuasive powers—a gift that still could put him in line to be his party's next leader."

The moment came on November 3, 2004, the day after the election. Tom Daschle had just lost his Senate race in South Dakota, becoming the first Senate leader in half a century to be defeated, and the Republicans had picked up five other seats being vacated by Democrats. Reid, who, as the Democrats' Minority Whip since 1998, had been Daschle's No. 2, had assiduously attended to his colleagues' needs, monitoring legislation on the Senate floor while earning a reputation as trustworthy. By 11 A.M., Reid had the votes he needed. Neither Bush, who had been unsure of his own victory until early that morning, nor Reid, who had spent much of the night on the phone, had slept much. Bush called Reid in Nevada, and, Reid recalled, "he said, 'This is a new term for me. I'm not running for anything ever again and I want to work with you again.'" Reid was pleased, and reported the conversation to his staff. "He had a significant majority in both the House and the Senate, and I thought he would work with us to try to get things done, that we could agree on," he said.

Reid has not been particularly tough on Bush's appointments so far. He voted to confirm Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State and even announced that he would probably support Scalia as Chief Justice if William Rehnquist retired and Bush wanted him. He didn't push for a filibuster against Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General, despite the opposition of all eight Democrats on the Judiciary Committee. Yet, on February 7th, the Republican National Committee attacked Reid's record on its Web site, citing the Los Angeles *Times* story on his family, in which Reid was accused of voting for legislation that benefitted his sons and son-in-law. (One passage quoted on the R.N.C. Web site said, "So pervasive are the ties among Reid, members of his family and Nevada's leading industries and institutions that it's difficult to find a significant field in which such a relationship does not exist.") On the Senate floor, Reid denounced the story as "scurrilous" and rebuked the President. Coincidentally, Bush had invited the Reids to dinner at the White House that night, along with three other senators and their wives. Reid initially thought about not going, but decided that "it would be too easy for them for me just not to go." Still, it was clear that he and Landra were angry. Reid recalled that Bush said, "You know, I didn't have anything to do with that. I don't know what they do." Reid wasn't mollified. The next day, he reminded reporters of Bush's campaign pledge to be a "uniter." "I'm beginning to think those statements were just absolutely false," he said.

There is no longer anything about Reid's family on the R.N.C. Web site. The offending lines were removed on orders from Karl Rove. According to Rove, following the dinner Bush told him to tell Ken Mehlman, the chairman of the R.N.C., to "never mention Reid's family again." When I asked Reid about this, he said he was aware that the section had been deleted, but not of Bush's role. "That's nice of him," he said.



Reid said that relations with Bush got worse in April, during the filibuster dispute, at a breakfast meeting in the White House between Bush and the congressional leadership. Reid said that he appealed to Bush to stay out of the fight, telling him, "I hope you're going to help us on this nuclear option." The President, he said, "was very direct and blunt: 'I have nothing to do with this. This is your business. It's not mine.'" Reid thought that would remove one powerful obstacle. But, within days, Vice-President Dick Cheney announced that, as acting president of the Senate, he would provide the tie-breaking vote if it was needed to change the rule. Bush, Reid said, had pulled a "halfback's stutter step"—a fake—on him. "He was just trying, it appears to me, to mislead me. He just wasn't telling me the truth at that breakfast meeting. No question about it. He could have said to me, 'What you've done is wrong and I'm going to do everything I can to get it exercised. I want all my judges.' But he didn't." Reid paused. "Just tell me what I have to work with. Don't mislead me. How do I say this—because I don't want to appear holier than thou—but relationships are built on trust, and that's the problem that I'm having with the White House today. It's that I don't think they want to establish trust with me." Reid paused again and shrugged. "I'm not important to them. They can just go around me." He sounded weary, but then his voice strengthened. "He's not a dictator. He's a President. And he has the same power that I do. He individually may have more power. But his branch of government has no more power than mine."

About a month later, at a point when negotiations on resolving the filibuster issue seemed to have stalled, Reid made his only phone call on the issue to the White House—to Rove. "This thing should be worked out," Reid said he told Rove. "It's craziness." At the time, Bush had re-submitted the names of seven appellate-court nominees whom Senate Democrats had previously blocked, using the filibuster tactic. “We let this continue to go on, twenty years from now, if either of us is still alive, we’re going to look back and be ashamed of what we allowed to happen,” Rove said. He said that harsh attacks were driving out possible nominees who were leery of the confirmation process. “I get it,” Reid responded. He told Rove that he had been trying for years to improve the process, and added, “I’m just trying to find a way out of this.”

For Rove, the most painful example was Miguel Estrada, who had worked in the Solicitor General’s office, and who was Bush’s first appellate-court nominee, in 2001. Estrada withdrew his name twenty-eight months after being nominated. During the confirmation struggle, Estrada’s wife miscarried; in November, 2004, she died, of an overdose of alcohol and sleeping pills. The death was ruled accidental by the medical examiner. Rove said that Mrs. Estrada had been traumatized by the nastiness of the process. Reid told Rove that he empathized with Estrada, but said that the Republicans’ treatment of President Clinton’s nominees—more than sixty were never voted on by the Judiciary Committee—had created victims, too. Rove, according to Reid, replied, “We need to sit down and talk about this,” adding that the ugliness of the confirmation process had reached a new low.

Rove recalls that the conversation was mostly about making a deal on the judicial nominees. According to Rove, Reid said, “They’re all unqualified, but you can pick the one you want,” and eventually it got to two. At one point, Rove asked Reid, “If they’re unworthy, why are you letting us have any?” And he said, “Harry, it’s like you’re asking us to pick one of our children and kill them.” He said that Reid kept jumping around with the numbers: “It was a nutty conversation.” For Reid at this point, the individual nominees were a secondary issue. “I didn’t like the judges,” he said later, “but there was a principle higher than any of those men or women”—the preservation of the Senate filibuster rule. When the discussion ended in an impasse, Reid was disappointed, but he said, “I wasn’t owed anything, that’s for sure.”

Reid had always regarded a full Senate vote on the “nuclear option” as a gamble. Frist appeared to hold the advantage; with Cheney in the wings, he needed only fifty senators to make the rules change, while Reid needed to persuade six Republicans to cross over. And although Reid thought that he had those six votes, he was certain only of four. “Each day, I started losing people,” he recalled. By May 23rd, the day before the scheduled vote, Reid believed that neither he nor Frist really knew for sure who had the votes, and when the seven Democrats in the Gang of Fourteen told Reid that they were ready to make a deal with the Republicans he acquiesced. “I thought we might have the six votes, but I wasn’t positive, and I wasn’t willing to take the chance. He”—Frist—“didn’t know that he had the votes, but he was willing to take the chance.” In the final compromise, three of the seven Bush judicial choices that Reid and Rove had discussed were approved by the Senate, and it was simultaneously agreed that senators could filibuster a nominee “under extraordinary circumstances”—somewhat vague language that has yet to be tested. For the Democrats, though, the agreement preserved the power to block a Bush Supreme Court choice.

Standing before reporters, Reid, who had worked behind the scenes for this result, looked euphoric. Frist, who appeared later, looked glum—understandably, some observers thought. Frist had staked a lot on the issue; he has said that he plans to retire from the Senate in 2006, and it is believed that he may seek the Presidency. “I was not a party to that agreement nor was the Republican leadership,” Frist said. “Now we move into a new and uncertain phase.” The Senate that Frist purportedly led had suddenly been taken over by a bipartisan group beyond his reach. And, for Reid and others, it is not a stretch to see the connection between the filibuster compromise and the relatively noncontroversial nomination of John G. Roberts. ♦

HOW’S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT

From the Louisville (Ky.) Courier-Journal.

The 2004 California wine grape harvest declined 3 percent over the year before, its second straight annual drop, and sent wine grape prices up 7 per cent, Legg Mason analysts wrote in a note to clients last week.

Louisville-based Brown-Forman, which owns Fetzer and Bolla wines, has blamed an oversupply of grapes in California and Australia for tight prices for retail wine.

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

WHAT I'D SAY TO THE MARTIANS

BY JACK HANDEY

People of Mars, you say we are brutes and savages. But let me tell you one thing: if I could get loose from this cage you have me in, I would tear you guys a new Martian asshole. You say we are violent and barbaric, but has any one of you come up to my cage and extended his hand? Because, if he did, I would jerk it off and eat it right in front of him. "Mmm, that's good Martian," I would say.

You say your civilization is more advanced than ours. But who is really the more "civilized" one? You, standing there watching this cage? Or me, with my pants down, trying to urinate on you? You criticize our Earth religions, saying they have no relevance to the way we actually live. But think about this: if I could get my hands on that god of yours, I would grab his skinny neck and choke him until his big green head exploded.

We are a warlike species, you claim, and you show me films of Earth battles to prove it. But I have seen all the films about twenty times. Get some new films, or, so help me, if I ever get out of here I will empty my laser pistol into everyone I see, even pets.

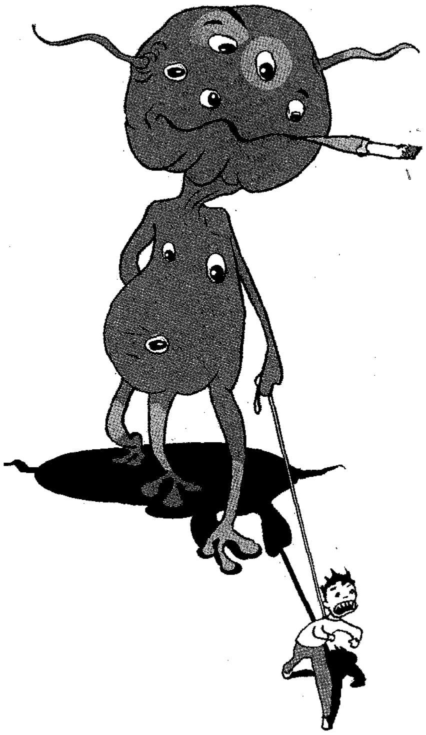
Speaking of films, I could show you some films, films that portray a different, gentler side of Earth. And while you're watching the films I'd sort of slip away, because guess what: the projector is actually a thing that shoots out spinning blades! And you fell for it! Well, maybe not now you wouldn't.

You point to your long tradition of living peacefully with Earth. But you know what I point to? Your stupid heads.

You say there is much your civilization could teach ours. But perhaps there is something that I could teach you—namely, how to scream like a parrot when I put your big Martian head in a vise.

You claim there are other intelligent beings in the galaxy besides earthlings and Martians. Good, then we can attack them together. And after we're through attacking them we'll attack you.

I came here in peace, seeking gold and slaves. But you have treated me like an intruder. Maybe it is not me who is the intruder but you.



No, not me. You, stupid.

You keep my body imprisoned in this cage. But I am able to transport my mind to a place far away, a happier place, where I use Martian heads for batting practice.

I admit that sometimes I think we are not so different after all. When you see one of your old ones trip and fall down, do you not point and laugh, just as we on Earth do? And I think we can agree that nothing is more admired by the people of Earth and Mars alike than a fine, high-quality cigarette. For fun, we humans like to ski down mountains covered with snow; you like to "milk" bacteria off of scum hills and pack them into your gill slits. Are we so different? Of course we are, and you will be even more different if I ever finish my homemade flamethrower.

You may kill me, either on purpose or by not making sure that all the surfaces in my cage are safe to lick. But you can't kill an idea. And that idea is: me chasing you with a big wooden mallet.

You say you will release me only if I sign a statement saying that I will not attack you. And I have agreed, the only condition being that I can sign with a long sharp pen. And still you keep me locked up.

True, you have allowed me reading material—not the "human reproduction" magazines I requested but the works of your greatest philosopher, Zandor or Zanax or whatever his name is. I would like to discuss his ideas with him—just me, him, and one of his big, heavy books.

If you will not free me, at least deliver a message to Earth. Send my love to my wife, and also to my girlfriend. And to my children, if I have any anyplace. Ask my wife to please send me a bazooka, which is a flower we have on Earth. If my so-called friend Don asks you where the money I owe him is, please anally probe him. Do that anyway.

If you keep me imprisoned long enough, eventually I will die. Because one thing you Martians do not understand is that we humans cannot live without our freedom. So, if you see me lying lifeless in my cage, come on in, because I'm dead. Really.

Maybe one day we will not be the enemies you make us out to be. Perhaps one day a little Earth child will sit down to play with a little Martian child, or larva, or whatever they are. But, after a while, guess what happens: the little Martian tries to eat the Earth child. But guess what the Earth child has? A gun. You weren't expecting that, were you? And now the Martian child is running away, as fast as he can. Run, little Martian baby, run!

I would like to thank everyone for coming to my cage tonight to hear my speech. Donations will be gratefully accepted. (No Mars money, please.) ♦

ISTVAN BANYAI

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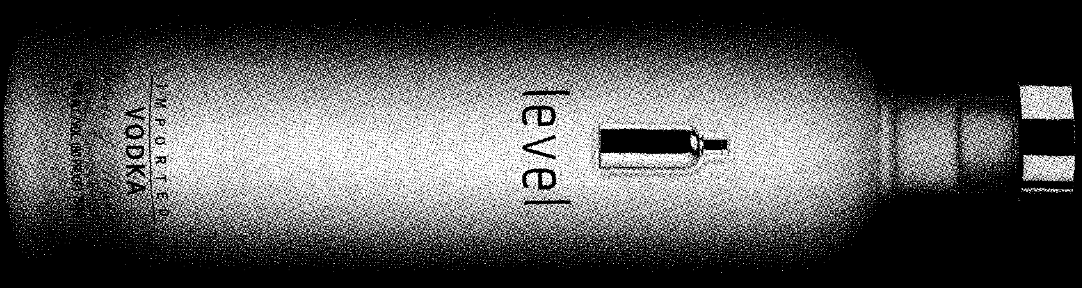

GO TO THE NEXT LEVEL

MASTER CLASS WITH PAUL HAGGIS

Patina Rodgers

On June 23rd writer-director Paul Haggis offered a master class on the fine art of taking it to the next level. His career provides a perfect case in point. After a successful stint in television, Mr. Haggis made the bold decision to take his ambitions one step higher: to write and direct feature films. The results can be found in the celebrated films *Million Dollar Baby* and *Crash*.

THE FIRST STEP
Paul's master class took place in Los Angeles and attracted talented hopefuls seeking the break into the business. Mr. Haggis retraced the first steps in his professional growth and shared insights from his widely varied experiences. Questions from the audience ranged from the minute to the macro: How does one structure the day around writing? What's the difference between writing for film and TV? What inspired the film *Crash*?

BRINGING UP BABY
Paul's first foray into film began when he optioned some short stories by a little-known fight manager and wrote a screenplay on spec. It wasn't an easy adaptation, Paul admitted. He inserted the estranged daughter plotline and created the Eddie "Scrap-Iron" Dupris character in order to make it work. Once finished, it wasn't obvious studio material. Nonetheless, *Million Dollar Baby* soon became a reality. In 2004, Paul's first-draft script was shot without changes and the film was in theaters less than a year later. The rest is history.

WHAT'S NEXT?
After the critical and commercial success of his second release, *Crash* (which he says is based on his personal experiences in Los Angeles), Paul continues to seek new and higher levels. Among many projects, he has written the screenplay for a new film and is currently casting what he hopes will be his next directing project. Watch the film listings. There's much more to come from the talented Paul Haggis.

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REFLECTIONS

MY BIRD PROBLEM

Love, grief, and a change in the weather.

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

February in South Texas: I'd checked into a roadside motel in Brownsville and was getting up in the dark every morning, making coffee for my friend Manley, who wouldn't talk to me or leave his bed until he'd had some, and then bolting the motel's free breakfast and running to our rental car and birding non-stop for twelve hours. I waited until night to buy lunch food and fill the car with gas, to avoid wasting even a minute of birdable daylight. The only way not to question what I was doing, and why I was doing it, was to do absolutely nothing else.

At the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, on a hot weekday afternoon, Manley and I hiked several miles down dusty trails to an artificial water feature on the far margin of which I saw three pale-brown ducks. Two of them were paddling with all deliberate speed into the cover of dense reeds, affording me a view mainly of their butts, but the third bird loitered long enough for me to train my binoculars on its head, which looked as if a person had dipped two fingers in black ink and drawn horizontal lines across its cheek.

"A masked duck!" I said. "You see it?"

"I see the duck," Manley said.

"A masked duck!"

The bird quickly disappeared into the reeds and gave no sign of reëmerging. I showed Manley its picture in my "Sibley."

"I'm not familiar with this duck," he said. "But the bird in this picture is the one I just saw."

"The three stripes on its face. The sort of cinnamony brown."

"Yes."

"It was a masked duck!"

We were within a few hundred yards of the Rio Grande. On the other side of the river, if you travelled south—say, to Brazil—you could see masked ducks by the dozens. They were a rarity north of the border, though. The pleasure of the sighting sweetened our long tramp back to the parking lot.

While Manley lay down in the car to take a nap, I poked around in a nearby marsh. Three middle-aged white guys with good equipment asked me if I'd seen anything interesting.

"Not much," I said, "except a masked duck."

All three began to talk at once.

"A masked duck!"

"Masked duck?"

"Where, exactly? Show us on the map."

"You're familiar with the ruddy duck. You do know what a female ruddy looks like."

"Are you sure it was a masked duck?"

I said that, yes, I'd seen female ruddies, we had them in Central Park, and this wasn't a ruddy duck. I said it was as if somebody had dipped two fingers in black ink and—

"Was it alone?"

"Were there others?"

"A masked duck!"

One of the men took out a pen, wrote down my name, and had me pinpoint the location on a map. His companions were already moving down the trail I'd come up.

"And you're sure it was a masked duck," the third man said.

"It wasn't a ruddy," I said.

A fourth man stepped out of some bushes right behind us. "I've got a nighthawk sleeping in a tree."

"This guy saw a masked duck," the third man said.

"A masked duck! Are you sure? Are you familiar with the female ruddy?"

The other two men came hurrying back up the trail. "Did someone say nighthawk?"

"Yeah, I've got a scope on it."

The five of us went into the bushes. The nighthawk, asleep on a tree branch, looked like a partly balled gray hiking sock. The scope's owner said that the friend of his who'd first spotted the bird had called it a lesser nighthawk, not a common. The well-equipped trio begged to differ.

"He said lesser? Did he hear its call?"

"No," the man said. "But the range—"

"Range doesn't help you."

"Range argues for common, if anything, at this time of year."

"Look where the wing bar is."

"Common."

"Definitely calling it a common."

The four men set off at a forced-march pace to look for the masked duck, and I began to worry. My identification of the duck, which had felt ironclad in the moment, seemed dangerously hasty in the context of four serious birders marching several miles in the afternoon heat. I went and woke up Manley.

"The only thing that matters," he said, "is that we saw it."

"But the guy took my name down. Now, if they don't see it, I'm going to get a bad rep."

"If they don't see it, they'll think it's in the reeds."

"But what if they see ruddies instead? There could be ruddies and masked ducks, and the ruddies aren't as shy."

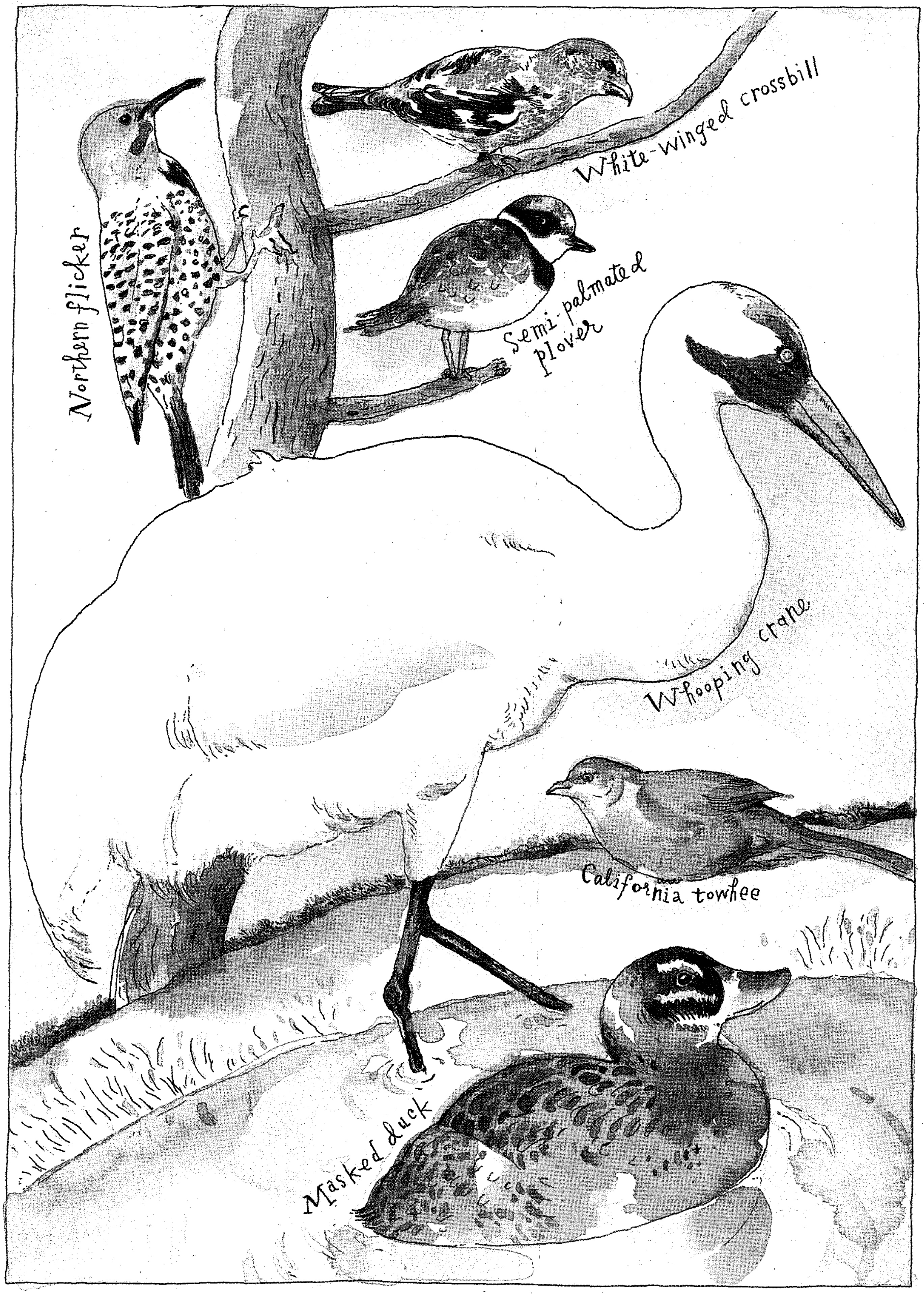
"It's something to be anxious about," Manley said, "if you want to be anxious about something."

I went to the refuge's visitor center and wrote in the logbook, *One certain and two partially glimpsed MASKED DUCKS, north end of Cattail #2.* I asked a volunteer if anyone else had reported a masked duck.

"No, that would be our first this winter," she said.

The next afternoon, on South Padre Island, in the wetland behind the convention center, where about twenty upper-Midwestern retirees and scraggly bearded white guys were pacing the boardwalks with cameras and binoculars, I saw a pretty, dark-haired young woman taking telephoto pictures of a

BARRY BLITT


White-winged crossbill
Northern flicker
Semi-palmated plover
Whooping crane
California towhee
Masked duck

pair of ducks. "Green-winged teals," I mentioned to Manley.

The girl looked up sharply. "Green-winged teals? Where?"

I nodded at her birds.

"Those are wigeons," she said.

"Right."

I'd made this mistake before. I knew perfectly well what a wigeon looked like, but sometimes, in the giddiness of spotting something, my brain got confused. As Manley and I retreated down the boardwalk, I showed him pictures.

"See," I said, "the wigeon and the green-winged teal have more or less the same palette, just completely rearranged. I should have said wigeon. Now she thinks I can't tell a wigeon from a teal."

"Why didn't you just tell her that?" Manley said. "Just say that the wrong word came out of your mouth."

"That would only have compounded it. It would have been protesting too much."

"But at least she'd know you know the difference."

"She doesn't know my name. I'll never see her again. That is my only conceivable consolation."

There is no better American place for birds in February than South Texas. Although Manley had been down here thirty years earlier, as a teen-age birder, it was a wholly new world to me. In three days, I'd seen fetchingly dishevelled anis flopping around on top of shrubs, Jurassic-looking anhingas sun-drying their wings, squadrons of white pelicans gliding downriver on nine-foot wingspans, a couple of caracaras eating a road-killed king snake, an elegant trogon and a crimson-collared grosbeak and two exotic robins all lurking on a postage-stamp Audubon Society tract in Weslaco. The only frustration was my No. 1 trip target bird, the black-bellied whistling duck. A tree-nester, strangely long-legged, with a candy-pink bill and a bold white eye-ring, the whistling duck was one of those birds in the field guide which I couldn't quite believe existed—a small modern-day roc. It was supposed to winter in good numbers on Brownsville's urban oxbow lakes (called *resacas*), and with each shoreline that I scanned in vain the bird became that much more mythical to me.

Out on South Padre, as fog rolled in off the Gulf of Mexico, I remembered to look up at the city water tower, where, according to my guidebook, a peregrine falcon often perched. Sure enough, very vaguely, I saw the peregrine up there. I set up my spotting scope, and an older couple, two seasoned-looking birders, asked me what I had.

"They're going to print a retraction—your desserts are not inconsistent."

"Peregrine falcon," I said proudly.

"You know, Jon," Manley said, his eye to the scope, "the head looks more like an osprey."

"That is an osprey," the woman quietly affirmed.

"*God*," I said, looking again, "it is *so hard* to tell in the fog, and to get a sense of scale, you know, way up there, but, you're right, yes, I see it. Osprey, osprey, osprey. Yes."

"That's the great thing about fog," the woman remarked. "You can see whatever you want."

A few minutes later, the dark-haired young woman came by with her tripod and big camera.

"Osprey," I told her confidently. "By the way, you know, I'm still totally writhing about saying 'teal' when I meant 'gadwall.' "

She stared at me. "*Gadwall*?"

Back in the car, using Manley's phone to avoid betraying my own name via caller I.D., I called the visitor center at Santa Ana and asked if "people" had been reporting any masked ducks on the refuge.

"Yes, somebody did report one yesterday. Down at Cattails."

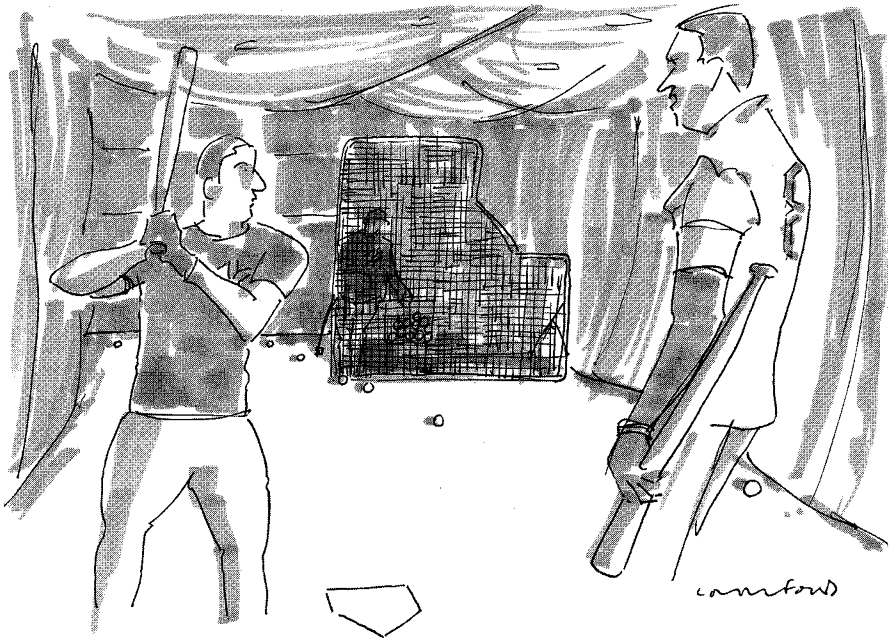
"Just one person?" I asked.

"Yes. I wasn't here. But somebody did report a masked duck."

"Fantastic!" I said—as if, by sounding excited, I could lend after-the-fact credibility to my own report. "I'll come look for it!"

Halfway back to Brownsville, on one of the narrow dirt roads that Manley liked to direct me down, we stopped to admire a lushly green-girdled blue *resaca* with the setting sun behind us. The delta in winter was too beautiful to stay embarrassed in for long. I got out of the car, and there, silent, on the shadowed side of the water, floating nonchalantly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world—which is, after all, the way of magical creatures in enchanted places—was my black-bellied whistling duck.

It felt weird to return to New York. Withdrawing from South Texas had left me hollow and restless, like an addict. It was a chore to make myself comprehensible to friends; I couldn't keep my



"You're making good contact. You just need to work on your quiet class."

mind on my work. Every night, I lay down with bird books and read about other trips I could take, studied the field markings of species I hadn't seen, and then dreamed vividly of birds. When two kestrels, a male and a female, possibly driven out of Central Park by the artist Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, began showing up on a chimney outside my kitchen window and bloodying their beaks on fresh-killed mice, their dislocation seemed to mirror my own.

One night in early March, I went to the Society for Ethical Culture to hear Al Gore speak on the subject of global warming. I was expecting to be amused by the speech's rhetorical badness—to roll my eyes at Gore's intoning of "fate" and "mankind," his flaunting of his wonk credentials, his scolding of American consumers. But Gore seemed to have rediscovered a sense of humor. His speech was fun to listen to, if unbelievably depressing. For more than an hour, with heavy graphical support, he presented compelling evidence of impending climate-driven cataclysms that will result in unimaginable amounts of upheaval and suffering around the globe, possibly within my own lifetime. I left the auditorium under a cloud of grief and worry of the sort I'd felt as a teenager reading about nuclear war.

Ordinarily, in New York, I keep a tight rein on my environmental consciousness, confining it, ideally, to the ten minutes per year when I write my guilt-assuaging checks to groups like the Sierra Club. But Gore's message was so disturbing that I was nearly back to my apartment before I could think of some reasons to discount it. Like: wasn't I already doing more than most Americans to combat global warming? I didn't own a car, I lived in an energy-efficient Manhattan apartment, I was good about recycling. Also: wasn't the weather that night *unusually cold* for early March? And hadn't Gore's maps of Manhattan in the future, the island half-submerged by rising sea levels, all shown that the corner of Lexington and Eighty-first Street, where I live, would stay high and dry in even the worst-case scenario? The Upper East Side has a definite topography. It seemed unlikely that seawater from Greenland's melting ice shelf would advance any farther than Citarella market on Third Avenue, six blocks to the south and east. Plus, my apartment was way up on the tenth floor.

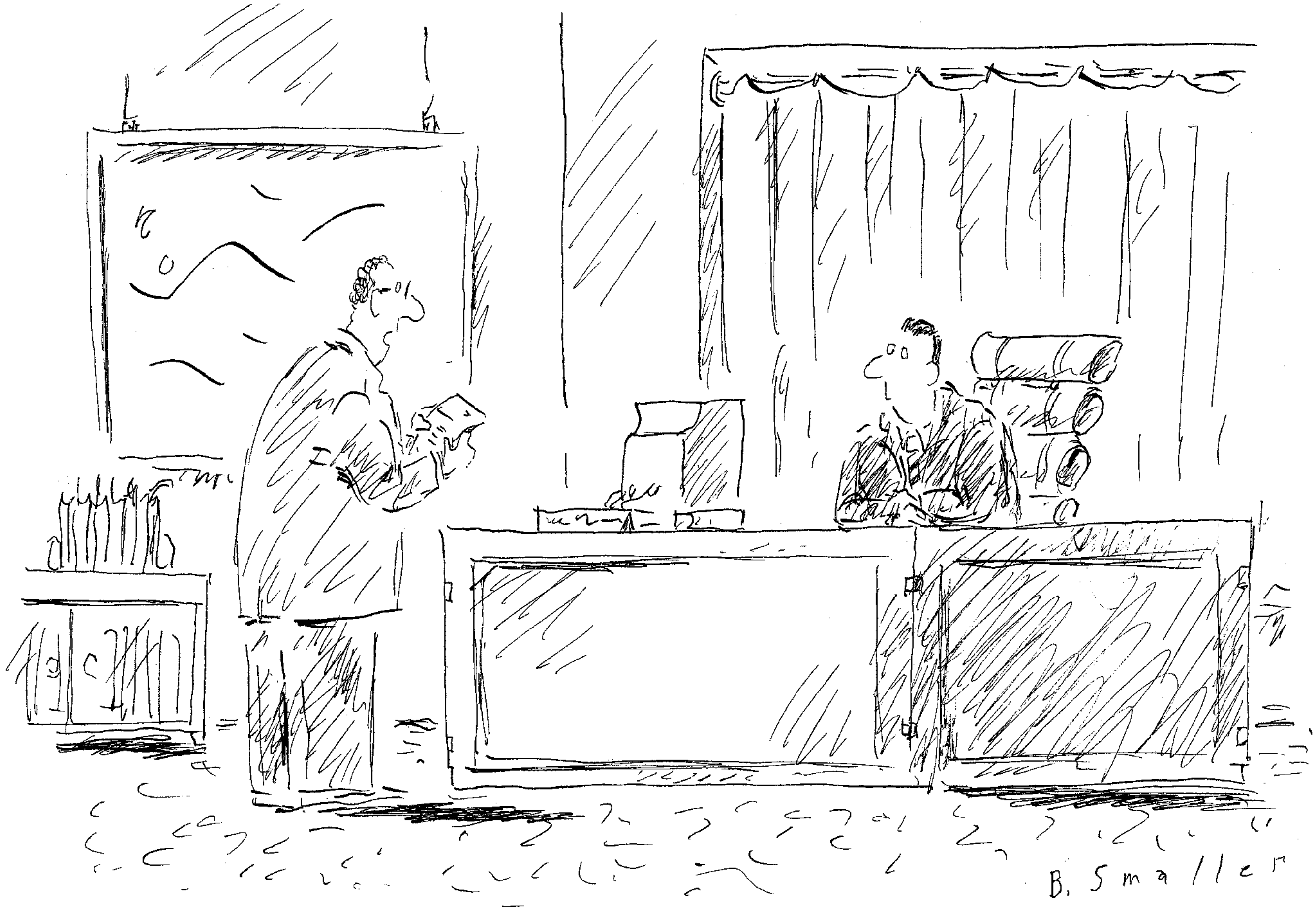
When I went inside, no kids came running to meet me, and this absence seemed to clinch it: I was better off spending my anxiety budget on viral pandemics and dirty bombs than on global warming. Even if I had had kids, it would have been hard work for me to care about the climatic well-being of their children's children. Not having kids freed me altogether. Not having kids was my last, best line of defense against the likes of Al Gore.

There was only one problem. Trying to fall asleep that night, mentally replaying Gore's computer images of a desertified North America, I couldn't find a way not to care about the billions of birds and thousands of avian species that were liable to be wiped out worldwide. Many of the Texan places that I'd visited in February had elevations of less than twenty feet, and the climate down there was already almost lethally extreme. Human beings could probably adapt to future changes, we were famously creative at averting disasters and at making up great stories when we couldn't, but birds didn't have our variety of options. Birds needed help. And this, I realized, was the true disaster for a comfortable modern New Yorker. This was the scenario I'd been at pains to avert for many years: not the world's falling apart in the future but my feeling inconveniently obliged to care about it in the present. This was my bird problem.

For a long time, back in the eighties, my wife and I lived on our own little planet. We spent thrilling, superhuman amounts of time by ourselves. In our first two apartments, in Boston, we were so absorbed in each other that we got along with exactly one good friend, and when we finally moved to Queens the friend moved to Manhattan, thereby sparing us the need to find a different friend.

Early in our marriage, when a former professor of mine asked me what the two of us were doing for a social life, I said we didn't have one. "That's sweet for a year," he said. "Two years at the most." His certainty offended me. It struck me as extremely condescending, and I never spoke to him again.

None of the doom criers among our relatives and former friends, none of these brow-furrowing emotional climatologists, seemed to recognize the special resourcefulness of our union. To prove them wrong, we made our aloneness work for four years, for five years, for six years; and then, when the domestic atmosphere really did begin to overheat, we fled from New York to a Spanish village where we didn't know anybody and the villagers hardly even spoke Spanish. We



"O.K., so you had to break a few eggs to make an omelette, but now some of those eggs are suing."

• •

were like those habit-bound peoples in Jared Diamond's "Collapse" who respond to an ecosystem's degradation by redoubling their demands on it—medieval Greenlanders, prehistoric Easter Islanders, contemporary S.U.V. buyers. Whatever reserves the two of us still had when we arrived in Spain were burned up in seven months of isolation.

Returning to Queens, we could no longer stand to be together for more than a few weeks, couldn't stand to see each other so unhappy, without running somewhere else. We reacted to minor fights at breakfast by lying face down in our respective rooms for hours at a time, waiting for acknowledgment of our pain. I wrote poisonous jeremiads to family members who I felt had slighted my wife; she presented me with handwritten fifteen- and twenty-page analyses of our condition; I was putting away a bottle of Maalox every week. It was clear to me that something was terribly wrong. And what was wrong, I decided, was modern industrialized society's assault on the environment.

In the early years, I'd been too poor to care about the environment. My first car in Boston was a vinyl-top '72 Nova that needed a tailwind to achieve ten miles a gallon and whose exhaust was bœuf bourguignonne-like in its richness and complexity. After the Nova died, we got a Malibu wagon whose ridiculous four-barrel carburetor ($800) needed replacing and whose catalytic converter ($350) had had its guts scraped out to ease the flow of gases. Polluting the air a little less would have cost us two or three months' living expenses. The Malibu practically knew its own way to the crooked garage where we bought our annual smog-inspection sticker.

The summer of 1988, however, had been one of the hottest on record in North America, and rural Spain had been a spectacle of unchecked development and garbage-strewn hillsides and diesel exhaust, and after the dismantlement of the Berlin Wall the prospect of nuclear annihilation (my longtime pet apocalypse) was receding somewhat, and the great thing about the rape of nature, as an alternative apocalypse, was the opportunity it gave me to blame myself. I had grown up deep in the Protestant Midwest, listening to daily lectures on personal responsibility. My father was a saver of string and pencil stubs and a bequeather of fantastic Swedish Lutheran prejudices. (He considered it unfair to drink a cocktail at home before going to a restaurant, because restaurants depended on liquor sales for profits.) To worry about the Kleenexes and paper towels I was wasting and the water I was letting run while I shaved and the sections of the Sunday *Times* I was throwing away unread and the pollutants I was helping to fill the sky with every time I took an airplane came naturally to me. Every time I washed out a peanut-butter jar, I tried to calculate whether less petroleum might be used in manufacturing a new jar than in heating the dishwater and transporting the old jar to a recycling center.

My wife moved out in December, 1990. A friend had invited her to come and live in Colorado Springs, and she was ready to escape the pollution of her living space by me. Like modern industrialized society, I continued to bring certain crucial material benefits to our household, but these benefits came at an ever greater psychic cost. By fleeing to the land of open skies, my wife hoped to restore her independent nature, which years of too-married life had compromised almost beyond recognition. She rented a pretty apartment on North Cascade Avenue, and sent me excited letters about the mountain weather. She became fascinated with narratives of pioneer women—tough, oppressed, resourceful wives who buried dead infants, watched freak June blizzards kill their crops and livestock, and survived to write about it. She talked about lowering her resting pulse rate below thirty.

Back in New York, I didn't believe we'd really separated. It may have become impossible for us to live together, but my wife's sort of intelligence still seemed to me the best sort, her moral and aesthetic judgments still seemed to me the only ones that counted. The smell of her skin and the smell of her hair were restorative, irreplaceable, the best. Deploring other people—their lack of perfection—had always been our sport. I couldn't imagine never smelling her again.

The next summer, we went car-camping in the West. I was frankly envious of my wife's new Western life, and I also wanted to immerse myself in nature, now that I'd become environmentally conscious. For a month, the two of us followed the retreating snow up through the Rockies and the Cascades and made our way back south through the emptiest country we could find. Considering that we were back together 24/7, sharing a small tent, and isolated from all social contacts, we got along remarkably well.

What sickened and enraged me were all the other human beings on the planet. The fresh air, the smell of firs, the torrents of snowmelt, the columbines and lupine, the glimpses of slender-ankled moose were nice sensations, but not intrinsically any nicer than a gin Martini or a well-aged steak. To really deliver the goods, the West also had to conform to my wish that it be unpopulated and pristine. Driving down an empty road through empty hills was a way of reconnecting with childhood fantasies of being a Special Adventurer—of feeling again like the children in Narnia, like the heroes of Middle-earth. But house-size tree-pullers weren't clear-cutting Narnia behind a scrim of beauty strips. Frodo Baggins and his compatriots never had to share campgrounds with forty-five identical Fellowships of the Ring wearing Gore-Tex parkas from R.E.I. Every crest in the open road opened up new vistas of irrigation-intensive monoculture, mining-scarred hillsides, and parking lots full of nature lovers' cars. To escape the crowds, my wife and I took longer hikes in deeper backcountry, toiling through switchbacks, only to find ourselves on dusty logging roads littered with horse manure. And here—look out!—came some gonzo clown bouncing on his mountain bike. And there, overhead, went Delta Flight 922 to Cincinnati. And here came a dozen Boy Scouts with jangling water cups and refrigerator-size backpacks. My wife had her cardiovascular ambitions to occupy her, but I was free to stew all day long: Were those human voices up ahead? Was that a speck of aluminum foil in the tree litter? Or, oh no, were those human voices coming up *behind us*?

I stayed in Colorado for a few more months, but being in the mountains had become unbearable to me. Why stick around to see the last beautiful wild places getting ruined, and to hate my own species, and to feel that I, too, in my small way, was one of the guilty ruiners? In the fall, I moved back East. Eastern ecologies, specifically Philadelphia's, had the virtue of already being ruined. It eased my polluter's conscience to lie, so to speak, in a bed I'd helped to make. And this bed wasn't even so bad. For all the insults it had absorbed, the land in Pennsylvania was still riotously green.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said of our marital planet. There, the time had come for me to take decisive action; the longer I delayed, the more damage I would do. Our once limitless-seeming supply of years for having kids, for example, had suddenly and alarmingly dwindled, and to dither for even just a few more years would be permanently ruinous. And yet: what decisive action to take? At this late date, I seemed to have only two choices. Either I should try to change myself radically—devote myself to making my wife happy, try to occupy less space, and be, if necessary, a full-time dad—or else I should divorce her.

Changing my character, however, was about as appetizing (and realistic) as volunteering for the drab, homespun, post-consumerist society that the "deep ecologists" tell us is the only long-term hope for the planet. Although I talked the talk of fixing and healing, and sometimes I believed it, a self-interested part of me had long been rooting for trouble and waiting, with calm assurance, for the final calamity to engulf us. I had old journals containing transcripts of early fights which read word for word like the fights we were having ten years later. I had a carbon copy of a letter I'd written to my brother, Tom, in 1982, after I'd announced our engagement to my family and Tom had asked me why the two of us didn't just live together and see how things went; I'd replied that in the Hegelian system a subjective phenomenon (e.g., romantic love) did not become, properly speaking, "real" until it took its place in an objective structure, and that it was therefore important that the individual and the civic be synthesized in a ceremony of commitment. I had wedding pictures in which, before the ceremony of commitment, my wife looked beatific and I could be seen frowning and biting my lip and hugging myself tightly.

But giving up on the marriage was no less unthinkable. It was possible that we were unhappy because we were trapped in a bad relationship, but it was also possible that we were unhappy for other reasons, and that we should be patient and try to help each other. For every doubt documented in the fossil record, I could find an old letter or journal entry in which I talked about our marriage with happy certainty, as if we'd been together since the formation of the solar system, as if there had always been the two of us and always would be. The skinny, tuxedoed kid in our wedding pictures, once the ceremony was over, looked unmistakably smitten with his bride.

So more study was needed. The fossil record was ambiguous. The liberal scientific consensus was self-serving. Maybe, if we tried a new city, we could be happy? We travelled to check out San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, Santa Fe, Seattle, Boulder, Chicago, Utica, Albany, Syracuse, and Kingston, New York, finding things to fault in each of them. My wife came back and joined me in Philadelphia, and I borrowed money at interest from my mother and rented a five-bedroom house that neither of us could stand to live in by the middle of 1993. I sublet a place for myself in Manhattan which I then, out of guilt, handed over to my wife. I returned to Philadelphia and rented yet a third space, this one suitable for both working and sleeping, so that my wife would have all five of the house's bedrooms at her disposal, should she need them, on her return to Philly. Our financial hemorrhaging in late 1993 looked a lot like the country's energy policy in 2005. Our determination to cling to unsustainable dreams was congruent with—maybe even identical to—our drive to bankrupt ourselves as rapidly as possible.

Around Christmastime, the money ran out altogether. We broke our leases and sold the furniture. I took the old car, she took the new laptop, I slept with other people. Unthinkable and horrible and ardently wished for: our little planet was ruined.

A staple of my family's dinner-table conversation in the mid-seventies, in St. Louis, was the divorce and remarriage of my father's boss at the railroad, Mr. German. Nobody of my parents' generation in either of their extended families had ever been divorced, nor had any of their friends, and so the two of them steeled each other in their resolve not to know Mr. German's young second wife. They exhaustively pitied the first wife, "poor Glorianna," who had been so dependent on her husband that she'd never even learned to drive. They expressed relief and worry at the Germans' departure from their Saturday-night bridge club, since Mr. German was bad at bridge but Glorianna was now left without a social life. One night, my father came home and said he'd almost lost his job that day at lunch. In the executive dining room, while Mr. German and his subordinates were discussing how to assess a person's character, my father had found himself remarking that he judged a man by how he played a bridge hand. I wasn't old enough to understand that he hadn't really almost lost his job for this, or that condemning Mr. German and pitying Glorianna were ways for my parents to talk about their own marriage, but I did understand that dumping your wife for a younger woman was the sort of despicable selfish thing that a chronic overbidder might do.

"Well, thank you, I'd love to. Are the Himalayas far?"

A related talk staple in those years was my father's hatred of the Environmental Protection Agency. The young agency had issued complicated rules about soil pollution and toxic runoff and riverbank erosion, and some of the rules seemed unreasonable to my father. What really enraged him, though, were the enforcers. Night after night, he came home fuming about these "bureaucrats" and "academics," these high-handed "so-and-sos" who didn't bother to hide how morally and intellectually superior they felt to the corporations they were monitoring, and who didn't think they owed explanations, or even basic courtesy, to people like my father.

The odd thing was how closely my father's values resembled those of his enemies. The breakthrough environmental legislation of that era, including the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and the Endangered Species Act, had attracted the support of President Nixon and both parties in Congress precisely because it made sense to old-fashioned Protestants, like my parents, who abhorred waste and made sacrifices for their kids' future and respected God's works and believed in taking responsibility for their messes. But the social ferment that gave rise to the first Earth Day, in 1970, unleashed a host of other energies—the incivility of the so-and-sos, the pleasurable self-realizations of Mr. German, the cult of individuality—that were inimical to the old religion and ultimately won out.

Certainly I, as a self-realizing individual in the nineties, was having trouble with my parents' logic of unselfishness. Deprive myself of an available pleasure *why*? Take shorter and colder showers *why*? Keep having anguished phone conversations with my estranged wife on the subject of our failure to have children *why*? Struggle to read Henry James's last three novels *why*? Stay mindful of the Amazon rain forest *why*? New York City, which I returned to for good in 1994, was becoming a very pleasant place to live again. The nearby Catskills and Adirondacks were better protected than the Rockies and the Cascades. Central Park, under recultivation by deep-pocketed locals, was looking greener every spring, and the other people out walking in it didn't enrage me: this was a *city;* there were *supposed* to be other people. On a May night in 1996, I walked across the Park's newly restored, deep-pile lawns to a party where I saw a beautiful and very young woman standing awkwardly in a corner, behind a floor lamp that she twice nearly knocked over, and I felt so liberated that I could no longer remember one single reason not to introduce myself to her and, in due course, start asking her out on dates.

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The old religion was finished. Without its cultural support—and once the E.P.A. had cleaned up the country's most glaring messes, once sea otters and peregrine falcons had rebounded from near-extinction, once Americans had had a disagreeable taste of European-style regulation—the environmental movement looked like just another special interest hiding in the skirts of the Democratic Party. It consisted of well-heeled nature enthusiasts, tree-spiking misanthropes, nerdy defenders of unfashionable values (thrift, foresight), invokers of politically unfungible abstractions (the welfare of our great-grandchildren), issuers of shrill warnings about invisible risks (global warming) and exaggerated hazards (asbestos in public buildings), tiresome scolds about consumerism, reliers on facts and policies in an age of image, a constituency loudly proud of its refusal to compromise with others. Bill Clinton, the first boomer President, knew a stinker when he saw one. Unlike Richard Nixon, who had created the E.P.A., and unlike Jimmy Carter, who had set aside twenty-five million acres of Alaska as permanent wilderness, Clinton needed the Sierra Club a lot less than it needed him. In the Pacific Northwest, on lands belonging to the American people, the U.S. Forest Service was spending millions of tax dollars to build roads for multinational timber companies that were clear-cutting gorgeous primeval forests and taking handsome profits for themselves, preserving a handful of jobs for loggers who would soon be out of work anyway, and shipping much of the timber to Asia for processing and sale. You wouldn't think this issue was an automatic public-relations loser, but groups like the Sierra Club decided to fight the battle out of public sight, in federal court, where their victories tended to be Pyrrhic; and the boomer President, whose need for love was non-satiable by Douglas firs or spotted owls but conceivably could be met by lumberjacks, soon added the decimation of the Northwest's old-growth forests to a long list of related setbacks—an environmentally toothless NAFTA, the metastasis of exurban sprawl, the lowering of average national vehicle fuel efficiency, the triumph of the S.U.V., the accelerating depletion of the world's fisheries, the Senate's 95–0 demurral on the Kyoto Protocol, etc.—in the decade when I left my wife and took up with a twenty-seven-year-old and really started having fun.

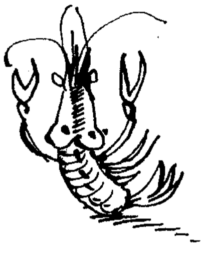
Then my mother died, and I went out bird-watching for the first time in my life. This was in the summer of 1999. I was on Hat Island, a wooded loaf of gravel subdivided for small weekend homes, near the blue-collar town of Everett, Washington. There were eagles and kingfishers and Bonaparte's gulls and dozens of identical sparrows that persisted, no matter how many times I studied them, in resembling six different sparrow species in the field guide I was using. Flocks of goldfinches brilliantly exploded up over the island's sunlit bluffs like something ceremonial and Japanese. I saw my first northern flicker and enjoyed its apparent confusion about what kind of bird it was. Unwoodpeckerish in plumage, like a mourning dove in war paint, it flew dippingly, in typical woodpecker fashion, white rump flashing, from one ill-fitting identity to another. It had a way of landing with a little crash wherever. In its careening beauty it reminded me of my former girlfriend, the one I'd first glimpsed tangling with a floor lamp and was still very fond of, though from a safe remove now.

I had since met a vegetarian Californian writer, a self-described "fool for animals," slightly older than I, who had no discernible interest in getting pregnant or married or in moving to New York. As soon as I'd surrendered to her general outstandingness, I'd set about trying to change her personality and make it more like mine; and although, a year later, I had nothing to show for this effort, I at least didn't have to worry about ruining somebody again. The Californian was a veteran of a ruinous marriage of her own. Her indifference to the idea of kids spared me from checking my watch every five minutes to see if it was time for my decision about her reproductive future. The person who wanted kids was me. And, being a man, I could afford to take my time.

The last day I ever spent with my mother, at my brother's house in Seattle, she asked me the same questions over and over: Was I pretty sure that the Californian was the woman I would end up with? Did I think we would probably get married? Was the Californian actually divorced yet? Was she interested in having a baby? Was I? My mother was hoping for a glimpse of how my life might proceed after she was gone. She'd met the Californian only once, at a noisy restaurant in Los Angeles, but she wanted to feel that our story would continue and that she'd participated in it in some small way, if only by expressing her opinion that the Californian really ought to be divorced by now. My mother loved to be a part of things, and having strong opinions was a way of not feeling left out. At any given moment in the last twenty years of her life, family members in three time zones could be found worrying about her strong opinions or loudly declaring that they didn't care about them or phoning each other for advice on how to cope with them.

Whoever imagined that "LOVE YOUR MOTHER" would make a good environmental bumper sticker obviously didn't have a mom like mine. Well into the nineties, tailing Subarus or Volvos outfitted with this admonition and its accompanying snapshot of Earth, I felt obscurely hectored by it, as if the message were "Nature Wonders Why She Hasn't Heard from You in Nearly a Month" or "Our Planet *Strongly* Disapproves of Your Life Style" or "The Earth Hates to Nag, But . . ." Like the natural world, my mother had not been in the best of health by the time I was born. She was thirty-eight, she'd had three successive miscarriages, and she'd been suffering from ulcerative colitis for a decade. She kept me out of nursery school because she didn't want to let go of me for even a few hours a week. She sobbed frighteningly when my brothers went off to college. Once they were gone, I faced nine years of being the last handy object of her maternal longings and frustrations and criticisms, and so I allied myself with my father, who was embarrassed by her emotion. I began by rolling my eyes at everything she said. Over the next twenty-five years, as she went on to have acute phlebitis, a pulmonary embolism, two knee replacements, a broken femur, three miscellaneous orthopedic surgeries, Raynaud's disease, arthritis, biannual colonoscopies, monthly blood-clot tests, extreme steroidal facial swelling, congestive heart failure, and glaucoma, I often felt terribly sorry for her, and I tried to say the right things and be a dutiful son, but it wasn't until she got a bad cancer diagnosis, in 1996, that I began to do what those bumper stickers admonished me to do.

She died in Seattle on a Friday morning. The Californian, who had been due to arrive that evening and spend some days getting acquainted with her, ended up alone with me for a week at my brother's vacation house on Hat Island. I broke down in tears every few hours, which I took as a sign that I was working through my grief and would soon be over it. I sat on the lawn with binoculars and watched a spotted towhee scratch vigorously in the underbrush, like somebody who really enjoyed yard work. I was pleased to see chestnut-backed chickadees hopping around in conifers, since, according to the guidebook, conifers were their favored habitat. I kept a list of the species I'd seen.

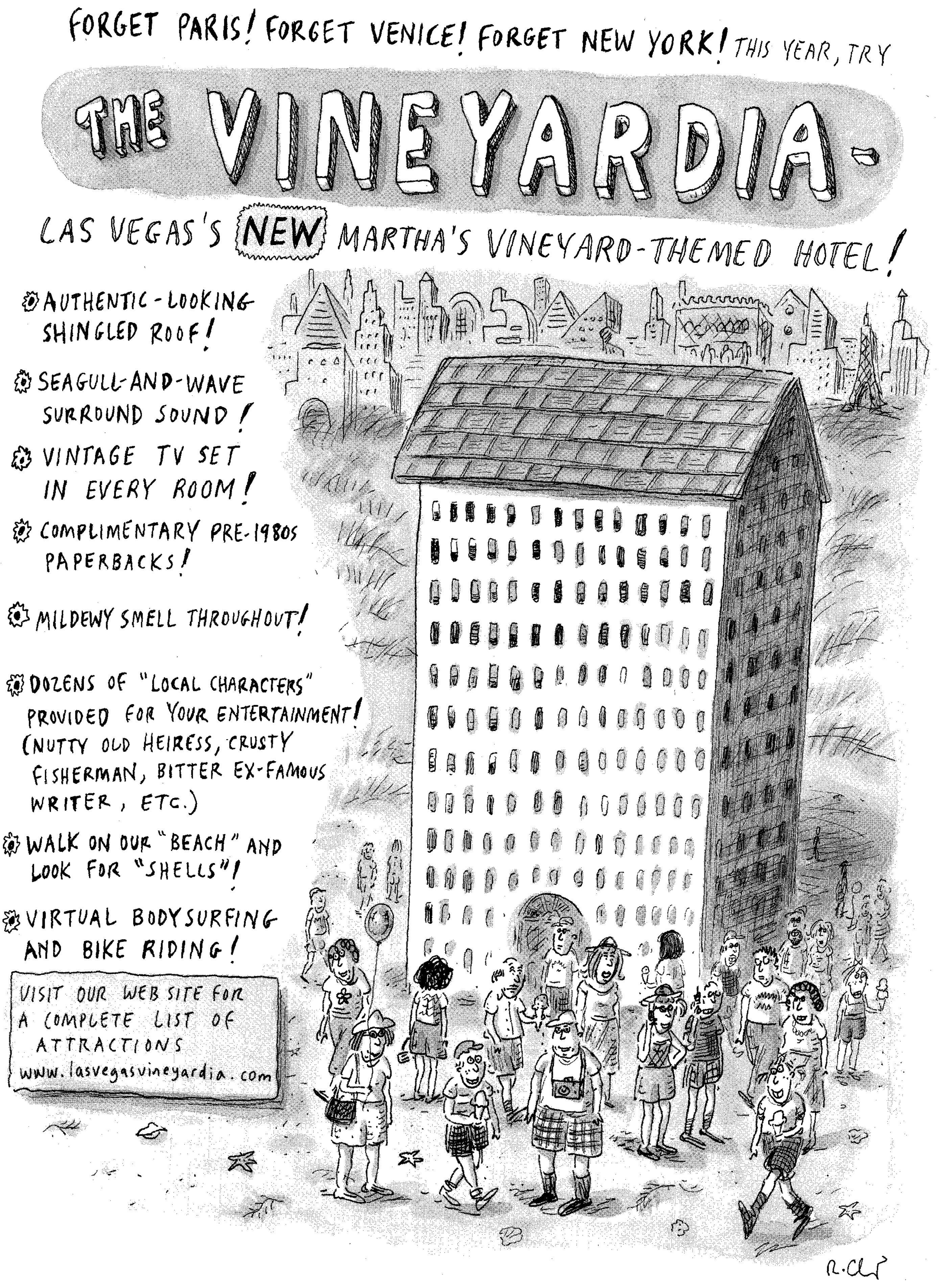


By midweek, though, I'd found a more compelling pastime: I began to badger the Californian about having children and the fact that she wasn't actually divorced yet. In the style of my mother, who had been a gifted abrader of the sensitivities of people she was unhappy with, I gathered and collated all the faults and weaknesses that the Californian had ever privately confessed to me, and I showed her how these interrelated faults and weaknesses were preventing her from deciding, *right now*, whether we would probably get married and whether she wanted to have children. By the end of the week, fully seven days after my mother's death, I was sure I was over the worst of my grief, and so I was mystified and angered by the Californian's unwillingness to move to New York and immediately try to get pregnant. Even more mystified and angered a month later, when she took wing to Santa Cruz and refused to fly back.

On my first visit to the cabin where she lived, in the Santa Cruz Mountains, I'd stood and watched mallards swimming in the San Lorenzo River. I was struck by how frequently a male and a female paired up, one waiting on the other while it nosed in the weeds. I had no intention of living without steak or bacon, but after that trip, as a token of vegetarianism, I decided to stop eating duck. I asked my friends what they knew about ducks. All agreed that they were beautiful animals; several also commented that they did not make good pets.

In New York, while the Californian took refuge from me in her cabin, I seethed with strong opinions. *The only thing I wanted* was for her and me to be in the same place, and I would gladly have gone out to California *if only she'd told me up front* that she wasn't coming to New York. The more months that went by without our getting closer to a pregnancy, the more aggressively I argued for living together, and, the more aggressively I argued, the flightier the Californian became, until I felt I had no choice but to issue an ultimatum, which resulted in a breakup, and then a more final ultimatum, which resulted in a more final breakup, and then a final final ultimatum, which resulted in a final final breakup, shortly after which I went out walking along the lake in lower Central Park and saw a male and a female mallard swimming side by side, nosing in the weeds together, and burst into tears.

It wasn't until a year or more later, after the Californian had changed her mind and come to New York, that I faced medical facts and admitted to myself that we weren't just going to up and have a baby. And even then I thought, Our domestic life is good right now, but if I ever feel like trying a different life with somebody else, I'll have a ready-made escape route from my current one: "Didn't I always say I wanted children?" Only after I turned forty-four, which was my father's age when I was born, did I get around to wondering why, if I was so keen to have kids, I'd chosen to pursue a woman whose indifference to the prospect had been clear from the begin-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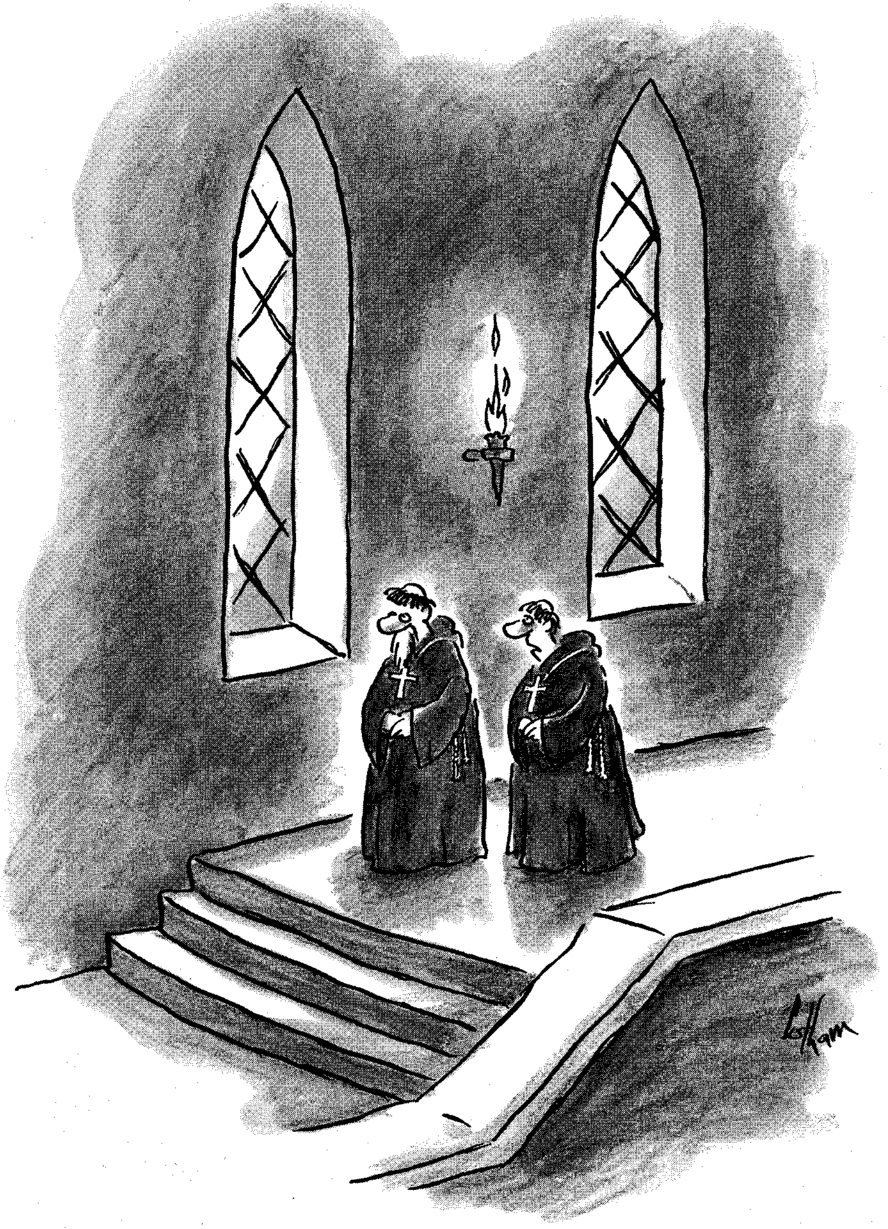


"I've decided to pursue a profession where religion doesn't play such an important role."

• •

ning. Was it possible that I wanted kids only with this one particular person, because I loved her? It was apparent, in any case, that my wish for kids had become non-transferrable. I was not Henry VIII. It wasn't as if I found fertility a lovable personality trait or a promising foundation for a lifetime of great conversation. On the contrary, I seemed to meet a lot of very boring fertile people.

Finally, sadly, around Christmastime, I came to the conclusion that my ready-made escape route had disappeared. I might find some other route later, but this route was no more. For a while, in the Californian's cabin, I was able to take seasonal comfort in stupefying amounts of aquavit, champagne, and vodka. But then it was New Year's, and I faced the question of what to do with myself for the next thirty childless years; and the next morning I got up early and went looking for the Eurasian wigeon that had been reported in south Santa Cruz County.

My affair with birds had begun innocently—an encounter on Hat Island, a morning of sharing binoculars with friends on Cape Cod. I wasn't properly introduced until a warm spring Saturday when the Californian's sister and brother-in-law, two serious birders who were visiting New York for spring migration, took me walking in the Park. We started at Belvedere Castle, and right there, on mulchy ground behind the weather station, we saw a bird shaped like a robin but light-breasted and feathered in russet tones. A veery, the brother-in-law said.

I'd never even heard of veeries. The only birds I'd noticed on my hundreds of walks in the Park were pigeons and sparrows and, from a distance, beyond a battery of telescopes, the nesting red-tailed hawks that had become such overexposed celebrities. It was weird to see a foreign, unfamous veery hopping around in plain sight, five feet away from a busy footpath, on a day when half of Manhattan was sunning in the Park. I felt as if, all my life, I'd been mistaken about something important. I followed my visitors into the Ramble in agreeably engrossed disbelief, as in a dream in which yellowthroats and redstarts and black-throated blue and black-throated green warblers had been placed like ornaments in urban foliage, and a film production unit had left behind tanagers and buntings like rolls of gaffer's tape, and ovenbirds were jogging down the Ramble's eroded hillsides like tiny costumed stragglers from some Fifth Avenue parade: as if these birds were just momentary bright litter, and the Park would soon be cleaned up and made recognizable again.

Which it was. By June, the migration was over; songbirds were no longer flying all night and arriving in New York at dawn, seeing bleak expanses of pavement and window, and heading to the Park for refreshment. But that Saturday afternoon had taught me to pay more attention. I started budgeting extra minutes when I had to cross the Park to get somewhere. Out in the country, from the windows of generic motels, I looked at the cattails and sumac by interstate overpasses and wished I'd brought binoculars. A glimpse of dense brush or a rocky shoreline gave me a crushlike feeling, a sense of the world's being full of possibility. There were new birds to look for everywhere, and little by little I figured out the best hours (morning) and the best places (near some water) to go looking. Even then, it sometimes happened that I would walk through the Park and see no bird more unusual than a starling, literally not one, and I would feel unloved and abandoned and wronged. (The stupid birds: where were they?) But then, later in the week, I'd see a spotted sandpiper by the Turtle Pond, or a hooded merganser on the Reservoir, or a green heron in some dirt by the Bow Bridge, and be happy.

Birds were what became of dinosaurs. Those mountains of flesh whose petrified bones were on display at the Museum of Natural History had done some brilliant retooling over the ages and could now be found living in the form of orioles in the sycamores across the street. As solutions to the problem of earthly existence, the dinosaurs had been pretty great, but blue-headed vireos and yellow warblers and white-throated sparrows—featherlight, hollow-boned, full of song—were even greater. Birds were like dinosaurs' better selves. They had short lives and long summers. We all should be so lucky as to leave behind such heirs.

The more I looked at birds, the more I regretted not making their acquaintance sooner. It seemed to me a sadness and a waste that I'd spent so many months out West, camping and hiking amid ptarmigans and solitaires and other fantastic birds, and had managed, in all that time, to notice and remember only one: a long-billed curlew in Montana. How different my marriage might have been if I'd been able to go birding! How much more tolerable our year in Spain might have been made by European waterfowl!

And how odd, come to think of it, that I'd grown up unscathed by Phoebe Snetsinger, the mom of one of my home-town classmates, who later became the most successful birder in the world. After she was given a diagnosis of metastatic malignant melanoma, in 1981, Snetsinger decided to devote the remaining months of her life to really serious birding, and in the next two decades, through repeated remissions and recurrences, she saw more species than any other human being before or since; her list was near eighty-five hundred when she was killed in a road accident while chasing rarities in Madagascar. Back in the seventies, my friend Manley had come under Snetsinger's influence. He finished high school with a life list of better than three hundred species, and I was more interested in science than Manley was, and yet I never aimed my binoculars at anything but the night sky.

One reason I didn't was that the best birders at my high school were serious potheads and acid users. Also, most of them were boys. Birding wasn't necessarily nerdy (nerds didn't come to school tripping), but the scene associated with it was not my idea of galvanic. Of sexy. Tramping in woods and fields for ten hours, steadily looking at birds, not communicating about anything but birds, spending a Saturday that way, was strikingly akin, as a social experience, to getting baked.

Which itself may have been one reason that, in the year following my introduction to the veery, as I began to bird more often and stay out longer, I had a creeping sense of shame about what I was doing. Even as I was learning my gulls and sparrows, I took care, in New York, not to wear my binoculars on a strap but to carry them cupped discreetly in one hand, and if I brought a field guide to the Park I made sure to keep the front cover, which had the word "BIRDS" in large type, facing inward. On a trip to London, I mentioned to a friend there, a book editor who is a very stylish dresser, that I'd seen a green woodpecker eating ants in Hyde Park, and he made a face and said, "Oh, Christ, don't tell me you're a twitcher." An American friend, the editor of a design magazine, also a sharp dresser, similarly clutched her head when I told her I'd been looking at birds. "No, no, no, no, no, no," she said. "You are not going to be a bird-watcher."

"Why not?"

"Because bird-watchers—*ucch*. They're all so—*ucch*."

"But if *I'm* doing it," I said, "and if I'm not that way—"

"But that's the thing!" she said. "You're going to *become* that way. And then I won't want to see you anymore."

She was talking in part about accessories, such as the elastic harness that birders attach to their binoculars to minimize neck strain and whose nickname, I'm afraid, is "the bra." But the really disturbing spectre that my friend had in mind was the undefended sincerity of birders. The nakedness of their seeking. Their so-public twitching hunger. The problem was less acute in the shady Ramble (whose recesses, significantly, are popular for both daytime birding and nighttime gay cruising); but in highly public New York places, like on the Bow Bridge, I couldn't bear to hold my binoculars to my eyes for more than a few seconds. It was just too embarrassing to feel, or to imagine, that my private transports were being witnessed by better-defended New Yorkers.

And so it was in California that the affair really took off. My furtive hour-long get-togethers gave way to daylong escapes that I openly spent birding, with bra. I set the alarm clock in the Californian's cabin for gruesomely early hours. To be juggling a stick shift and a thermos of coffee when the roads were still gray and empty, to be out ahead of everyone, to see no headlights on the Pacific Coast Highway, to be the only car pulled over at Rancho del Oso State Park, to already be on site when the birds were waking up, to hear their voices in the willow thickets and the salt marsh and the meadow whose scattered oaks were draped with epiphytes, to sense the birds' collective beauty imminent and findable in there: what a pure joy this all was. In New York, when I hadn't slept enough, my face ached all day; in California, after my first morning look at a foraging grosbeak or a diving scoter, I felt connected to a nicely calibrated drip of speed. Days passed like hours. I moved at the same pace as the sun in the sky; I could almost feel the earth turning. I took a short, hard nap in my car and woke up to see two golden eagles arrogantly working a hillside. I stopped at a feed lot to look for tricolored and yellow-headed blackbirds amid a thousand more plebeian birds, and what I saw instead, when the multitude wheeled into defensive flight, was a merlin coming to perch on a water tower. I walked for a mile in promising woods and saw basically nothing, a retreating thrush, some plain-Jane kinglets, and then, just as I was remembering what a monumental waste of time birding was, the woods came alive with songbirds, something fresh on every branch, and for the next fifteen minutes each birdlike movement in the woods was a gift to be unwrapped—Western wood pewee, MacGillivray's warbler, pygmy nuthatch—and then, just as suddenly, the wave was gone again, like inspiration or ecstasy, and the woods were quiet.

Always, in the past, I'd felt like a failure at the task of being satisfied by nature's beauty. Hiking in the West, my wife and I had sometimes found our way to summits unruined by other hikers, but even then, when the hike was perfect, I would wonder, Now what? And take a picture. Take another picture. Like a man with a photogenic girlfriend he didn't love. As if, unable to be satisfied myself, I at least might impress somebody else later on. And, when the picture-taking finally came to feel just too pointless, I took mental pictures. I enlisted my wife to agree that such-and-such vista was incredible, I imagined myself in a movie with this vista in the background and various girls I'd known before my marriage watching the movie and being impressed with me; but nothing worked. The stimulations remained stubbornly theoretical, like sex on Prozac.

Only now, when nature had become the place where birds were, did I finally get what all the fuss was about. The California towhee that I watched at breakfast every morning, the plainest of medium-small brown birds, a modest ground-dweller, a giver of cheerful, elementary chipping calls, brought me more pleasure than Half Dome at sunrise or the ocean shoreline at Big Sur. The California towhee generally, the whole species, reliably uniform in its plumage and habits, was like a friend whose energy and optimism had escaped the confines of a single body to animate roadsides and back yards across thousands of square miles. And there were six hundred and fifty other species that bred in the United States and Canada, a population so varied in look and habitat and behavior—kites, hummingbirds, shearwaters, snipe—that, taken as a whole, they were like a companion with an inexhaustibly rich personality. They made me happy in a way nothing outdoors ever had.

My response to this happiness, naturally, was to worry that I was in the grip of something diseased and bad and wrong. An addiction. Every morning, driving to an office I'd borrowed in Santa Cruz, I would wrestle with the urge to stop and bird for "a few minutes." Seeing a good bird made me want to stay out and see more good birds, and not seeing a good bird made me sour and desolate, for which the only cure was, likewise, to keep looking. If I did manage not to stop for "a few minutes," and if my work then didn't go well, I would sit and think about how high the sun was getting and how stupid I'd been to chain myself to my desk. Finally, toward noon, I would grab my binoculars, at which point the only way not to feel guilty about blowing off a workday was to focus utterly on the rendezvous, to open a field guide against the steering wheel and compare, for the twentieth time, the bill shapes and plumages of Pacific and red-throated loons. If I got stuck behind a slow car or made a wrong turn, I swore viciously and jerked the wheel and crushed the brakes and floored the accelerator.

I worried about my problem, but I couldn't stop. On business trips, I took whole personal days for birding, in Arizona and Minnesota and Florida, and it was here, on these solitary trips, that my affair with birds began to compound the grief I was seeking refuge from. Phoebe Snetsinger, in her pointedly titled memoir, "Birding on Borrowed Time," had described how many of the great avian haunts she'd visited in the eighties were diminished or destroyed by the late nineties. Driving on new arteries, seeing valley after valley sprawled over, I became increasingly distressed about the plight of wild birds. The ground-dwellers were being eaten by domestic and feral cats, the low fliers were getting run down on ever-expanding exurban roads, the medium fliers were dismembering themselves on cell-phone towers and wind turbines, the high fliers were colliding with brightly lit skyscrapers or mistaking rain-slick parking lots for lakes or landing in "refuges" where men in boots lined up to shoot them. On Arizona roads, the least fuel-efficient vehicles identified themselves with American flags and bumper-sticker messages like "IF YOU CAN'T FEED 'EM, DON'T BREED 'EM." The Bush Administration claimed that Congress never intended the Endangered Species Act to interfere with commerce if local jobs were at stake—in effect, that endangered species should enjoy federal protection only on land that nobody had any conceivable commercial use for. The country as a whole had become so hostile to the have-nots that large numbers of the have-nots themselves now voted against their own economic interests.

The difficulty for birds, in a political climate like this, is that they are just profoundly poor. To put it as strongly as possible: they subsist on bugs. Also on worms, seeds, buds, rodents, minnows, pond greens, grubs, and garbage. A few lucky species—what birders call "trash birds"—cadge a living in urban neighborhoods, but to find more interesting species it's best to go to sketchy areas: sewage ponds, landfills, foul-smelling mudflats, railroad rights-of-way, abandoned buildings, tamarack swamps, thornbushes, tundra, weedy slashes, slime-covered rocks in shallow lagoons, open plains of harsh sawgrass, manure pits on dairy farms, ankle-turning desert washes. The species that reside in and around these bird ghettos are themselves fairly lucky. It's the birds with more expensive tastes, the terns and plovers that insist on beachfront housing, the murrelets and owls that nest in old-growth forests, that end up on endangered-species lists.

Birds not only want to use our valuable land; they're also hopelessly unable to pay for it. In Minnesota, north of Duluth, on an overcast morning when the temperature was hovering near ten, I saw a clan of white-winged crossbills, a flock of muted reds and golds and greens, crawling all over the apex of a snowy spruce tree. They weighed less than an ounce apiece, they'd been outdoors all winter, they were flashy in their feather coats, the spruce cones were apparently delicious to them, and even as I envied them their sociability in the snow I worried for their safety in the for-profit future now plotted by the conservatives in Washington. In this future, a small percentage of people will win the big prize—the Lincoln Navigator, the mansion with a two-story atrium and a five-acre lawn, the second home in Laguna Beach—and everybody else will be offered electronic simulacra of luxuries to wish for. The obvious difficulty for crossbills in this future is that crossbills don't *want* the Navigator. They don't *want* the atrium or the amenities of Laguna. What crossbills want is boreal forests where they can crack open seed cones with their parrot-of-the-northland bills. When our atmospheric carbon raises global temperatures by another five degrees, and our remaining unlogged boreal forests have succumbed to insects em-

NAKED

Take off your shoes, he said,
and hurl them into the sea.
Take off that satin shirt
and hand it to me,
and it had better fit, he said,
or you're fucking dead.
Take off those gray cords
and hope you're my size.
Take off the underpants
and pull them over your eyes,
and, blind, take off each sock
while waggling your cock,
ignoring the laughs I gift you
in this ghastly hour—
for *you*, that is, he said,
before laughing some more
and slapping me on the rump
commanding me to jump.
Higher! Higher! he shouted
and I heard a gun click
as sweat bubbled out of me
and I began to get sick.
Stop that or I fucking shoot!
You disgusting brute!
He kicked me in the balls
till I doubled up.
Stand up straight! he roared.
You contemptuous pup!
And he hit me on the head
with the gun till I bled.
More mess! he bellowed.
You're worse than a pig.
Then he handed me a spade
and ordered me to dig.

—*Matthew Sweeney*

boldened by the shorter winters, and crossbills run out of places to live, the "ownership society" isn't going to help them. Their standard of living won't be improvable by global free trade. Not even the pathetic state lottery will be an option for them then.

In Florida, at the Estero Lagoon at Fort Myers Beach, where, according to my guidebook, I was likely to find "hundreds" of red knots and Wilson's plovers, I instead found a Jimmy Buffett song playing on the Holiday Inn beachfront sound system and a flock of gulls loitering on the white sand behind the hotel. It was happy hour. As I was scanning the flock, making sure that it consisted entirely of ring-billed gulls and laughing gulls, a tourist came over to take pictures. She kept moving closer, absorbed in her snapshots, and the flock amoebically distanced itself from her, some of the gulls hopping a little in their haste, the group murmuring uneasily and finally breaking into alarm cries as the woman bore down with her pocket digital camera. How, I wondered, could she not see that the gulls only wanted to be left alone? Then again, the gulls didn't seem to mind the Jimmy Buffett. The animal who most clearly wanted to be left alone was me. Farther down the beach, still looking for the promised throngs of red knots and Wilson's plovers, I came upon a particularly charmless stretch of muddy sand on which there was a handful of more common shorebirds, dunlins and semipalmated plovers and least sandpipers, in their brownish-gray winter plumage. Camped out amid high-rise condos and hotels, surveying the beach in postures of sleepy disgruntlement, with their heads scrunched down and their eyes half shut, they looked like a little band of misfits. Like a premonition of a future in which all birds will either collaborate with modernity or go off to die someplace quietly. What I felt for them went beyond love. I felt outright identification. The well-adjusted throngs of collaborator birds in South Florida, both the trash pigeons and the trash grackles and the more stately but equally tame pelicans and cormorants, all struck me now as traitors. It was this motley band of modest peeps and plovers on the beach that reminded me of the human beings I loved best—the ones who didn't fit in. These birds may or may not have been capable of emotion, but the way they looked, beleaguered there, few in number, my outcast friends, was how I felt. I'd been told that it was bad to anthropomorphize, but I could no longer remember why. It was, in any case, anthropomorphic only to see yourself in other species, not to see them in yourself. To be hungry all the time, to be mad for sex, to not believe in global warming, to be shortsighted, to live without thought of your grandchildren, to spend half your life on personal grooming, to be perpetually on guard, to be compulsive, to be habit-bound, to be avid, to be unimpressed with humanity, to prefer your own kind: these were all ways of being like a bird. Later in the evening, in posh, necropolitan Naples, on a sidewalk outside a hotel whose elevator doors were decorated with huge blowups of cute children and the monosyllabic injunction "SMILE," I spotted two disaffected teen-agers, two little chicks, in full Goth plumage, and I wished that I could introduce them to the brownish-gray misfits on the beach.

A few weeks after I heard Al Gore speak at the Ethical Culture Society, I went back to Texas. According to my new AviSys 5.00 bird-listing software, the green kingfisher that I'd seen in the last hour of my trip with Manley had been my three-hundred-and-seventieth

North American bird. I was close to the satisfying milestone of four hundred species, and the easiest way to reach it without waiting around for spring migration was to go south again.

I also missed Texas. For a person with a bird problem, there was something oddly reassuring about the place. The lower Rio Grande Valley contained some of the ugliest land I'd ever seen: dead flat expanses of industrial farming and downmarket sprawl bisected by U.S. Route 83, which was a jerry-rigged viaduct flanked by three-lane frontage roads, Whataburgers, warehouses, billboards suggesting "VAGINAL REJUVENATION" and "FAITH PLEASES GOD" and "DON'T DUMP" ("Take your trash to a landfill"), rotting town centers where only the PayLess shoe stores seemed to be in business, and fake-adobe strip malls so pristinely bleak it was hard to tell if they were still being built or had already opened and gone bankrupt. And yet, to birds, the valley was a Michelin three-star destination: Worth a Journey! Texas was the home of President Bush and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, neither of whom was ever mistaken for a friend of the environment; its property owners were famously hostile to federal regulation; and yet it was the state where, with some serious driving, you could tally two hundred and thirty species of bird in a single day. There were thriving Audubon societies, the world's biggest birding-tour operator, special campgrounds and R.V. parks for birders, twenty annual birding festivals, and the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, which snaked for twenty-one hundred miles around petrochemical installations and supertanker hulls and giant citrus farms, from Port Arthur to Laredo. Texans didn't seem to lose much sleep over the division between nature and civilization. Even ardent bird-lovers in Texas referred to birds collectively as "the resource." Texans liked to use the oxymoron "wildlife management." They were comfortable with hunting and viewed birding as basically a nonviolent version of it. They gave me blank, dumbfounded looks when I asked them if they identified with birds and felt a kinship with them or whether, on the contrary, they saw birds as beings very different from themselves. They asked me to repeat the question.

I flew into McAllen. After revisiting the refuges I'd hit with Manley, and bagging specialties like the parauque (No. 374), the elf owl (No. 379), and the fulvous whistling duck (No. 383), I drove north to a scrap of state land where the black-capped vireo (No. 388) and golden-cheeked warbler (No. 390), two endangered species, were helpfully singing out their locations. Much of my best birding, however, took place on private land. A friend of a friend's friend gave me a tour of his eight-thousand-acre ranch, near Waco, letting me pick up three new inland sandpiper species on wetlands that he'd taken a federal tax credit for creating. On the King Ranch, whose landholdings are larger than Rhode Island and include a hundred thousand acres of critical coastal habitat for migrating songbirds, I paid a hundred and nineteen dollars for the opportunity to see my first ferruginous pygmy owl and my first northern beardless tyrannulet. North of Harlingen, I visited other friends of friends' friends, a pediatric dentist and his wife who had created a private wildlife refuge for themselves on forty-five hundred acres of mesquite. The couple had dug a lake, replaced old hunting blinds with nature-photography blinds, and planted big flower beds to attract birds and butterflies. They told me about their efforts to reëducate certain of their landowning neighbors who, like my father in the seventies, had been alienated by environmental bureaucrats. To be Texan was to take pride in the beauty and diversity of Texan wildlife, and the couple believed that the conservationist spirit in most Texan ranchers just needed a little coaxing out.

This, of course, was an axiom of movement conservatism—if you get government off people's backs, they'll gladly take responsibility—and it seemed to me both wishful and potentially self-serving. At a distance, in New York, through the fog of contemporary politics, I probably would have identified the dentist and his wife, who were Bush supporters, as my enemies. But the picture was trickier in closeup. For one thing, I was liking all the Texans I met. I was also beginning to wonder whether, poor though birds are, they might prefer to take their chances in a radically privatized America where income distribution is ever more unequal, the estate tax is repealed, and land-proud Texan ranchers are able to preserve their oak mottes and vast mesquite thickets and lease them out to wealthy hunters. It certainly was very pleasant to bird on a private ranch! Far away from the picnick-

"That's the fifth time this year your metabolism has changed."

ers and the busloads of schoolkids! Far from the bikers, the off-roaders, the dog-walkers, the smoochers, the dumpers, the partyers, the bird-indifferent masses! The fences that kept them out were no impediment to warblers and thrashers.

It was on federal property, though, that I got my four-hundredth species. In the village of Rockport, on Aransas Bay, I boarded a shallow-draft birding boat, the Skimmer, which was captained by an affable young outdoorsman named Tommy Moore. My fellow-passengers were some eager older women and their silent husbands. If they'd been picnicking in a place where I had a rarity staked out, I might not have liked them, but they were on the Skimmer to look at birds. As we cut across the bay's shallow, opaque-gray waters and bore down on the roosting site of a dozen great blue herons—birds so common I hardly noticed them anymore—the women began to wail with astonishment and pleasure: "Oh! Oh! What magnificent birds! Oh! Look at them! Oh, my God!"

We pulled up alongside a very considerable green salt marsh. In the distance, hip deep in salt grass, were two adult whooping cranes whose white breasts and long, sturdy necks and russet heads reflected sunlight that then passed through my binoculars and fell upon my retinas, allowing me to claim the crane as my No. 400. One of the animals was bending down as if concerned about something in the tall grass; the other seemed to be scanning the horizon anxiously. Their attitude reminded me of parent birds I'd seen in distress elsewhere—two bluejays in the Ramble fluttering in futile, crazed rage while a raccoon ate their eggs; a jittery, too-alert loon sitting shoulder-deep in water by the side of a badly flooded Minnesota lake, persisting in incubating eggs that weren't going to hatch—and Captain Moore explained that harm appeared to have befallen the yearling child of these two cranes; they'd been standing in the same place for more than a day, the young crane nowhere to be seen.

"Could it be dead?" one of the women asked.

"The parents wouldn't still be there if it had died," Moore said. He took out his radio and called in a report on the birds to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge office, which told him that the chief crane biologist was on his way out to investigate.

"In fact," Moore told us, stowing the radio, "there he is."

Half a mile away, on the far side of a shallow salt pool, keeping his head low and moving very slowly, was a speck of a human figure. The sight of him there, in stringently protected federal territory, was disconcerting in the way of a boom mike dipping into a climactic movie scene, a stagehand wandering around behind Jason and Medea. Must humankind insert itself into *everything*? Having paid thirty-five dollars for my ticket, I'd expected a more perfect illusion of nature.

The biologist himself, inching toward the cranes, alone in his waders, didn't look as if he felt any embarrassment. It was simply his job to try to keep the whooping crane from going extinct. And this job, in one sense, was fairly hopeless. There were currently fewer than three hundred and fifty wild whooping cranes on the planet, and although the figure was definitely an improvement on the 1941 population of twenty-two, the long-term outlook for any species with such a small gene pool was dismal. The entire Aransas reserve was one melted Greenland ice shelf away from being suitable for waterskiing, one severe storm away from being a killing field. Nevertheless, as Captain Moore informed us, scientists had been taking eggs from the crane's nests in western Canada and incubating them in Florida, where there was now a wholly manufactured second flock of more than thirty birds, and since whooping cranes don't naturally know the way to migrate (each new generation learns the route by following its parents), scientists had been trying to teach the cranes in Florida to follow an airplane to a second summering site in eastern Canada . . .

To know that something is doomed and to cheerfully try to save it anyway: it was a characteristic of my mother. I had finally started to love her near the end of her life, when she was undergoing a year of chemotherapy and radiation and living by herself. I'd admired her bravery for that. I'd admired her will to recuperate and her extraordinary tolerance of pain. I'd felt proud when her sister remarked to me, "Your mother looks better two days after abdominal surgery than I do at a dinner party." I'd admired her skill and ruthlessness at the bridge table, where she wore the same determined frown when she had everything under control as when she knew she was going down. The last decade of her life, which started with my father's dementia and ended with her colon cancer, was a rotten hand that she played like a winner. Even toward the end, though, I couldn't tolerate being with her for more than three days at a time. Although she was my last living link to a web of Midwestern relations and traditions that I would begin to miss the moment she was gone, and although, the last time I saw her in her house, in April, 1999, her cancer was back and she was rapidly losing weight, I still took care to arrive in St. Louis on a Friday afternoon and leave on a Monday night. She, for her part, was accustomed to my leavings and didn't complain too much. But she still felt about me what she'd always felt, which was what I wouldn't really feel about her until after she was gone. "I hate it when daylight-saving time starts while you're here," she told me while we were driving to the airport, "because it means I have an hour less with you."

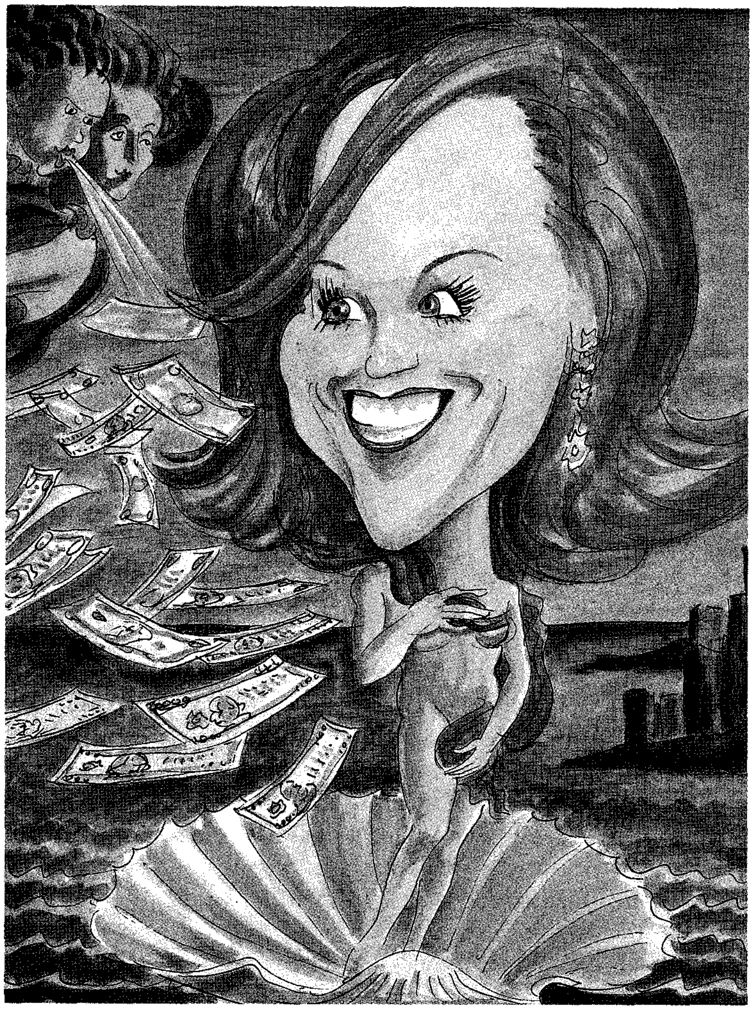
As the Skimmer moved up the channel, we were able to approach other cranes close enough to hear them crunching on blue crabs, the staple of their winter diet. We saw a pair doing the prancing, graceful, semi-airborne dance that gets them sexually excited. Following the lead of my fellow-passengers, I took out my digital camera and dutifully snapped some pictures. But all of a sudden—it might have been reaching the empty plateau of four hundred species—I felt weary of birds and birding. For the moment, at least, I was ready to be home in New York again, home among my kind. Every happy day with the Californian made the dimensions of our future losses a little more grievous, every good hour sharpened my sadness at how fast our lives were going, how rapidly death was coming out to meet us, but I still couldn't wait to see her: to drop my bags inside the door, to go and find her in her study, where she would probably be chipping away at her interminable e-mail queue, and to hear her say, as she always said when I came home, "So? What did you see?" ♦

ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE DAWN PATROL

The curious rise of morning television, and the future of network news.

BY KEN AULETTA



Likability is the main currency for the morning hosts Katie Couric, of NBC, and Diane Sawyer, of ABC.

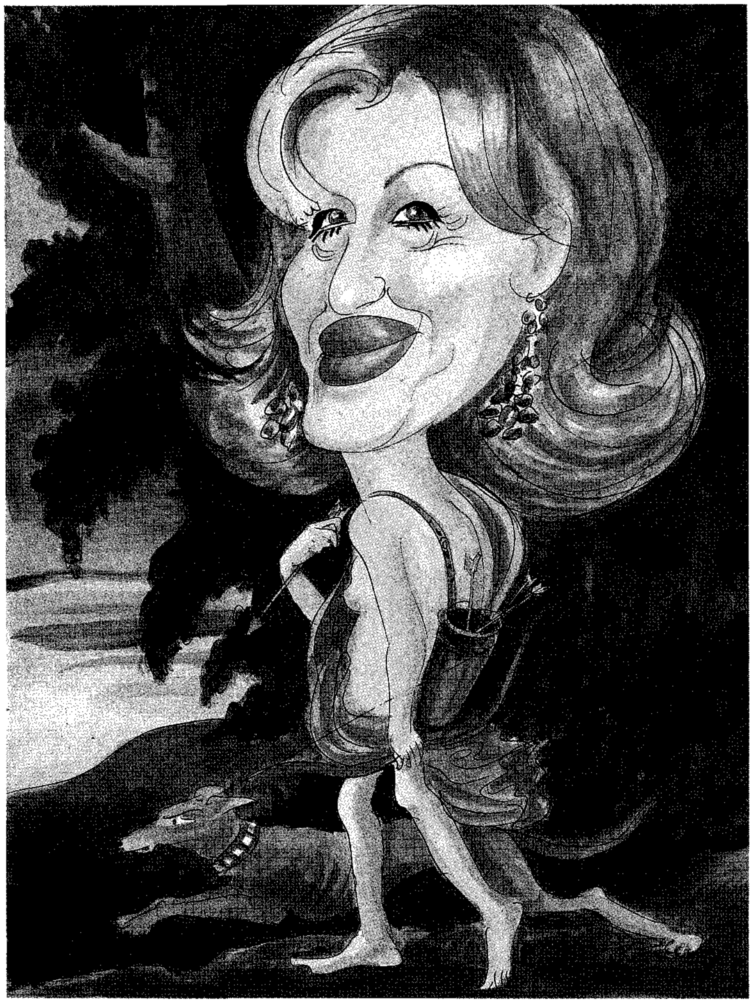
Katie Couric still finds it surprising when people come up to her and say things like "You're in my bedroom every morning." But Couric, the co-anchor of NBC's "Today" show, understands the impulse. "People have a very personal relationship with us," she says, referring to herself and her co-anchor, Matt Lauer. For most of the past fifty-three years, "Today" has been the favored companion of morning viewers. It is the most profitable program on any network—its commercials earn about two hundred and fifty million dollars annually, about three times as much as ABC's "Good Morning America" or CBS's "The Early Show." ("Today," which averages six million viewers, earns more because it reaches a larger and younger audience and, unlike its competitors, is on for three hours, not two, on weekdays.) While the networks have been rapidly losing viewers throughout the day—to cable, the Internet, and other distractions—the morning shows have gained them; these shows are "driving network-television news divisions," Jeff Zucker, the president of the NBC Universal Television Group, says, in part because, at the major networks, their profits amount to roughly three-quarters of what the news divisions earn. ("Today" generates another three hundred and fifty million dollars a year for NBC's two hundred local stations.)

"Today" was once a temporary stint for network stars; John Chancellor, Barbara Walters, and Tom Brokaw all took it on, enjoying the exposure but worrying about the format. In the mid-seventies, when Brokaw finished a tour as chief White House correspondent and was offered the "Today" co-anchor spot, he was afraid that all the celebrity chitchat and the cooking demonstrations would undermine his news credentials; he refused to do commercials, as previous anchors had. Bryant Gumbel, who replaced Brokaw in 1982, says, "I always had the feeling the news brass was embarrassed by the variety-show aspects of 'Today' and by the fact that I was not a news guy. I was from sports." Couric, on the other hand, says, "I never saw it as a pit stop."

The variety-show ingredients date from the début of "Today," in January of 1952. The program was created by the NBC executive Sylvester (Pat) Weaver (who invented the "Tonight Show" two years later). For its first nine years, "Today" was part of the entertainment division and was anchored by Dave Garroway, who was regularly joined on the air by a chimpanzee named J. Fred Muggs. On his first day, Garroway promised viewers that the show would "put you in touch with the world," without being "stuffy about it." That mission has remained more or less intact.

The morning programs have always put an enormous premium on the "likability" of their on-air personalities, to an often cloying degree. Couric's audience knows how nervous she is when her children leave for camp, why the Kentucky-born Diane Sawyer, the co-anchor of ABC's "Good Morning America," began a segment by telling the audience, "Y'all are going to meet my big sister," who is "my best friend, my guide," why her co-anchor Charles Gibson talked about his anxieties when his daughter was married, and why Matt Lauer jokes about losing his hair. They all want to be regular folks, despite their multimillion-dollar paychecks. Likability, not news credentials, is their currency. "Morning-show anchors take a very interesting role in people's families," Couric said when we met one morning at a restaurant near Rockefeller Center. "People feel very familial with them, and get very comfortable with them. People don't want too much cynicism. I hope people want intelligent questioning. I hope people want to get to the bottom of issues. I hope people want us to be appropriately challenging. But some people say to me, 'I turn you on in the morning and you always seem like you have a smile on your face and you're happy.' And I'm, like, 'Well, O.K.' Some days, I'm really tired or whatever. But there's a certain reassuring quality about morning television; it reminds people that the world is still in one piece and turning, and here's what people need to know about."

Insofar as a television personality can become an imaginary friend, Couric, the smiling face of "Today" for fourteen years, has managed it. In 1996, she told a *Times* reporter that the only bad thing ever written about her was that "I had chipmunk cheeks." But, if television viewers begin to feel less fond of Couric, to the network the financial shock could be enormous. And, lately, "Good Morning America" has steadily narrowed the gap between the two programs. (CBS has never seriously figured in the morning competition.) Something has happened to Couric's "likability"; her image has changed. In network focus groups, viewers have complained that she flirts with guests and spends too much time with celebrities. In April, the *Times*' chief television critic, Alessandra Stanley, wrote, "America's girl next door has morphed into the mercurial diva down the hall." Some people who have worked with her have complained—always anonymously—that she can be self-absorbed, that she tries to hog the best interviews, and that she doesn't prepare the way Lauer does. Two of the show's former executive producers, Jonathan Wald and Tom Touchet, have privately told colleagues they thought that the program had become "too Katie-centric," with the staff too focussed on making her happy.



EDWARD SOREL

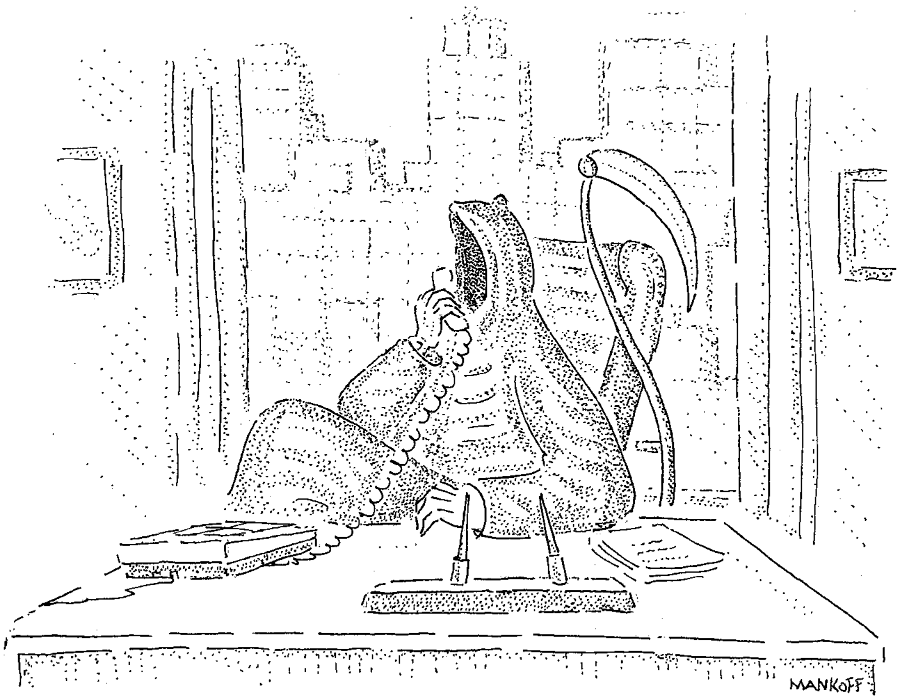
Couric, on being asked about this persistent criticism, said, "I feel like a human piñata. The disappointing thing is no candy is going to spill out!" She laughed, a little tensely, and added, "This may not be a lot of fun, but it goes with the territory, unfortunately, of being successful and female, probably."

In January, 1999, when Sawyer and Gibson first went head to head with Couric and Lauer, "Today" had an advantage of more than two million viewers. By May of this year, "G.M.A." trailed "Today" by an average of about two hundred thousand viewers, and on some days it came in first. Last winter, Jeffrey Immelt, the chairman and C.E.O. of General Electric, NBC's corporate parent, told Jeff Zucker that his foremost priority was to fix "Today."

There are rules to doing morning television. Nearly seventy per cent of the audience is female, and, according to Ben Sherwood, "G.M.A." 's executive producer, stories, and those who tell them, must be "relatable" to women. For example, the most important job of "Today" 's Al Roker is not to provide weather reports but to play a character—friendly, jokey—called Al Roker. The weather is beside the point. Sherwood says that it is important for the audience to get the feeling "that good things are possible today."

Morning television, unlike, say, the eleven-o'clock local evening news, is queasy about mayhem. David Poltrack, the executive vice-president for research and planning at CBS, says that the network doesn't want to "show bloody bodies" or "focus too much on crime." A certain chastity is also valued. When, in April, Couric played golf with the actor Hugh Jackman, she paused as she was about to swing her club and said, "If you feel like you need to help me by coming up behind me and wrapping your arms around me, feel free." Couric later explained that she was offering "sort of a wink to women in the audience." Crossing the line, she said, would be saying to Jackman, "Gee, Hugh, your butt looks good in those pants." Similarly, when the actor Will Smith appeared on "G.M.A.," he politely tried to plant a kiss on Diane Sawyer's lips; she just as politely turned her cheek. "As Charlie always says, 'You're in people's homes at an extremely raw time of day,'" Sawyer said. "You just want to be a good friend who is not throwing curves."

Another rule, Couric says, is that you shouldn't "be too glamorous or make



"Oh, can't complain."

• •

people feel uncomfortable." But, like everyone who works in morning television, Couric knows that the rules are flexible. "I recently did an interview on episiotomies, so I'm not sure there's anything you can't do," she says. "And, believe me, I was about to get sick when the doctor described the procedure." The morning hosts are "among the most versatile people on television," Zucker says. "They are both journalists and entertainers." Sometimes they behave like fans or fellow-celebrities, and the rules permit this, too. The morning shows and magazine news shows "must ingratiate themselves and grovel to get interviews," Connie Chung, who has worked for the three networks and CNN, says. "The harm is that the reporting disappears and the flavor of the week becomes paramount." One morning last spring, Sawyer asked Ashton Kutcher if, as *People* and other celebrity magazines had reported, his girlfriend, Demi Moore, was pregnant. When Kutcher replied that *People* belongs "next to the toilet," Sawyer looked into the camera and exclaimed, "I *tried!* Gosh, I *tried!*," as if she were doing her audience's bidding but at the same time apologizing to a fellow-celebrity. In June, when Lauer had a seriocomic episode interviewing Tom Cruise, he repeatedly challenged the actor's certitude on what Cruise called "the history of psychiatry," but he also said, referring to Cruise's pending marriage to Katie Holmes, "I'm happy you're happy. I really am. It's good to see you this way."

The first time that Harry Smith was asked to co-anchor the CBS morning show, in 1987, he was, like Brokaw, hesitant, until he had an epiphany. In the role of Mephistopheles, a CBS News executive closed the door of his office and told Smith, "You have to make a choice. If you're going to do this, go all the way." Smith says, "Once I crossed that line, I was more comfortable. You get these notions about journalism and the sanctity of it. What we try to do is give people the entire newspaper every day. It's a whole package." Smith's current senior executive producer, Michael Bass, says, "We are expected to make money. It's not just a public service."

On morning television, breaking news is usually less about Iraq and judicial nominations than about the tabloid narrative of the moment: the Michael Jackson trial, the disappearance of Jennifer Wilbanks (the "runaway bride"), the Cruise-Holmes courtship, a severed finger found in a bowl of chili, a high-school senior missing in Aruba.

The priority is to grab the audience's attention right away. "In sports, the audience builds from the kickoff to the last two minutes," Jim Bell, a former sports producer who is now "Today" 's executive producer, says. "With 'Today,' the biggest audience is at the beginning." The first half hour is also seen as "the last chance to get to men," Jonathan Wald says. The trick then is to hold on to the audience. The more minutes people watch, the higher the ad rates. Thus the first half hour is used to promote stories in the second half hour—for instance, an interview with Angelina Jolie.

There are, to be sure, stories on the morning shows that one might see on the front page of the *Times*—the nomination of a Supreme Court Justice, subway bombings in London—but, in a four-minute newscast beginning at 7:02 A.M., such stories are invariably sandwiched between news of the latest Steven Spielberg film and a lost hiker found in the lava fields of Hawaii. Each program conducts minute-by-minute measurements of viewer response to stories, and these reveal, Harry Smith says, "that the tabloid stuff bumps the numbers."

There are differences among the morning shows. "Today" carries more Washington and international news than "Good Morning America" and "The Early Show." The pace of "G.M.A." is faster than that of "Today." When John Bolton, President Bush's nominee for Ambassador to the United Nations, was accused of being an abrasive boss, "Today" devoted eight minutes to a report that included split-screen interviews with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; "G.M.A." did a shorter, "relatable" report on "workplace bullies," citing Bolton, among others.

But the programs have far more similarities than differences. These days, according to Jane Pauley, who was on the "Today" show for thirteen years, "a four-minute interview seems long." Bryant Gumbel, who co-anchored "Today" from 1982 to 1997, says, "When Tom Brokaw did it, critics used to say that it was 'too soft.' And when I did it they used to laugh that it was 'too soft.' And yet, in comparison to today's shows, what we did was 'MacNeil/Lehrer.'"

Katie Couric was the youngest of four children. Her mother, Elinor, was a homemaker and a Planned Parenthood volunteer. Her father, John, was a journalist with the United Press, among other organizations, and a public-relations executive. The family lived in a brick Colonial house with a white picket fence in Arlington, Virginia. In elementary school, Couric was president of the student body. In high school, she was a cheerleader and a member of the track team and the National Honor Society, wrote for the school newspaper, and dated the good-looking boys. In 1975, she entered the University of Virginia, where she majored in American studies and began thinking about journalism. "I always loved to write," she says. "And I'm sort of curious. So my dad encouraged me to try a career in journalism. He just thought it would suit the few skills I had." In the fall of 1979, she got her mother to drive her to CBS's headquarters in Washington, D.C. There she went up to a security guard and asked if she could tour the newsroom. "She looked at me as if I were on crack," Couric says. At ABC, her persistence got her hired as a desk assistant.

Couric shared a house in Georgetown with a fellow news assistant, Wendy Walker. The following year, Couric and Walker, who is still a friend, went to the brand-new CNN, where they worked in Washington. One morning, a correspondent didn't show up and the producer asked Couric to fill in. CNN's news chief, Reese Schonfeld, was at home, watching. He thought that Couric looked and sounded like a sixteen-year-old. "I never want to see her on the air again," he said. For the next four years, she was a producer, in Atlanta. CNN wouldn't give her a regular reporting slot, but she did get an on-air job on WTVJ, in Miami, and another on WRC, the NBC affiliate in Washington. There she made an impression on the Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis and on NBC's bureau chief, Tim Russert. Russert hired her in 1989 as the deputy correspondent at the Pentagon.

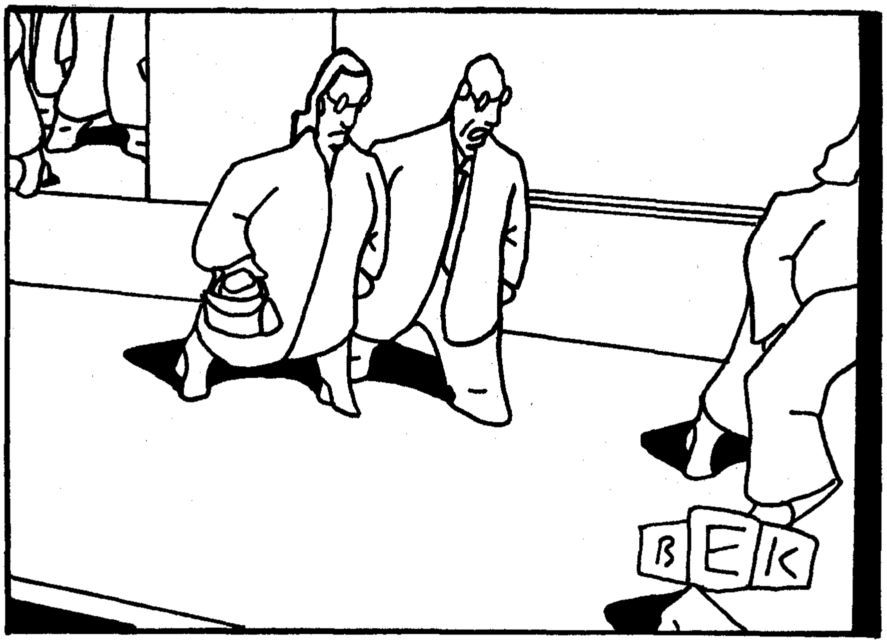
When Fred Francis covered the United States' invasion of Panama, Couric did live reports from the Pentagon. Soon she was occasionally anchoring the "Nightly News" on Saturday, and by June of 1990 she had become a national correspondent for "Today"—calling herself "Katherine Couric." Around that time, she met Jay Monahan, an associate at the Washington law firm of Williams & Connolly. Couric and Monahan were married a year and a half later.

Steve Friedman, who has done two tours as the producer of "Today," believes that there is a significant shift in the ratings after "a seminal moment." He says that he once helped manufacture such a moment, in 1987—"what I call the destruction of David Hartman," who had been a "G.M.A." host since its début, in 1975. Friedman and others leaked stories to the press suggesting that Hartman, a former actor, was not the nice guy he appeared to be on the air. Hartman's ratings slipped, and he left "G.M.A." and was replaced by Charles Gibson.

"Today" had one of those moments early in 1989, with the public disclosure of a confidential memo that Bryant Gumbel had written to Marty Ryan, who at that time was the executive producer, criticizing him for not being tough enough "to stand on folks"—like the weatherman Willard Scott, for his "bad taste," and the movie reviewer Gene Shalit. Gumbel was trying to exercise the same editorial control over "Today" that anchors exercised over the evening news, but the memo undermined the network's efforts to portray "Today" as a happy family. Gumbel soon apologized, and made up with Scott on the air, but "Today" lost viewers.

Another such turn came in the fall of 1989, when NBC News executives decided that Deborah Norville should replace Jane Pauley. Many viewers saw Norville as a figure out of "All About Eve," the classic blond interloper eager to topple her predecessor. The day that Pauley left—December 29, 1989—"Today" relinquished first place to "Good Morning America," and did not reclaim it until 1994. "She was so beautiful—and she's a great person, too," Couric says of Norville. "But I remember someone saying to me that she couldn't watch her in the morning without getting dressed."

In April of 1991, NBC chose Couric, who was then thirty-four, to replace Norville. NBC executives liked what they'd seen of Couric. Not since the rise of Doris Day had the word "perky" got such a workout. And yet, before she accepted, Couric insisted that she get an equal share of the newsmaker interviews, as Barbara Walters once did. "Not



"Seeing it again, I was newly struck by whatever you thought about it."

to sound too Helen Reddy-ish," she recalls, "but I felt like I had an obligation as a woman, and for the women who were watching, to have an equal role on the show, and not a subservient role."

During her first week, "Today" started referring to her as Katie. Under Jeff Zucker, who took over in 1992 as the program's executive producer, and who had been Couric's producer and friend when she was in Washington, "Today" kept its identity as a combination newscast and variety show but was more serious, certainly in its first half hour. "Jeff brought a lot of energy to the program," Gumbel says. "More than anything, he keyed into the election of 1992"—when Bill Clinton challenged George H. W. Bush. "We became kind of the place to be for the politicians. We had Ross Perot on for an hour, Bill Clinton for an hour. We had Bob Squier and Roger Ailes as political analysts." Couric's interviews could be aggressive. She asked Pat Buchanan, who had lost every primary he entered, "Are you trying to drive the President crazy? Or are you just on a big ego trip?"

Zucker, who was then twenty-six and beginning his own rise at NBC, told people, "Katie's the most natural person I've ever seen in this role." He would hold the camera on her wide, slightly crooked smile, and Couric, for her part, played the role of a regular girl, with a safe pinch of irreverence. She helped loosen up "Today," including the sometimes aloof Gumbel. Once, he turned to her and asked whether her daughter slept through the show.

"Only during your interviews!" she replied with a grin.

By 1994, "Today" was ahead again in the ratings, and it maintained its lead for the next decade. "Good Morning America" was in trouble for another reason: the program's co-anchor, Joan Lunden, was going through what David Westin, the president of ABC News, calls "a phase in her life"—what others, less politely, called a "public midlife crisis." (Lunden had recently been divorced, and her image changed when she began dating celebrities, among them Kevin Costner.) "G.M.A." tried four different executive producers in four years, and each took a different direction, including, Westin recalls, targeting "twenty-two-year-old women. So we lost our core audience of fifty-year-old women." "G.M.A." managed to lose a quarter of its audience in two years.

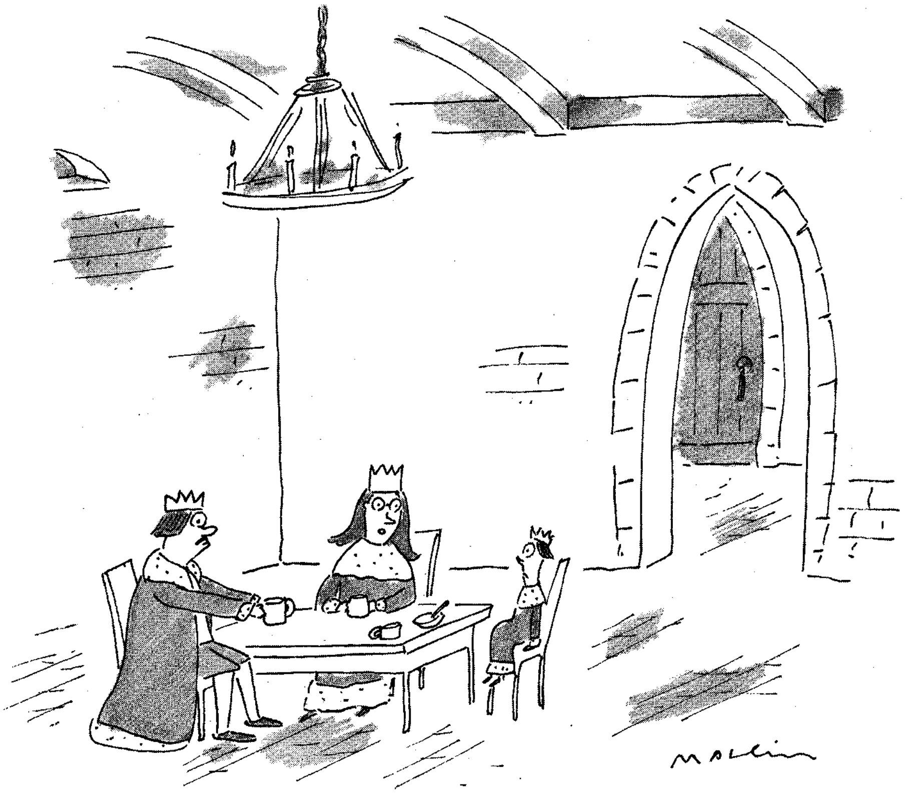
"After-psychotherapy mint?"

In 1997, Lunden, who had been with the show for seventeen years, was replaced as anchor by Lisa McRee. Charles Gibson, who was often described as "the glue" on the "G.M.A." set, was dispirited. Gibson had once been a Capitol Hill correspondent for ABC News, and he wanted the news division to fix "G.M.A." "We began to shoot the whole program like MTV," he recalls. "There was one young woman after another coming in here who had nice legs and didn't know beans, and we were putting them on the air." He left in 1998, and was replaced by Kevin Newman. "ABC executives discussed killing 'G.M.A.' when I came to ABC News, in 1997," Westin says. (Philip Beuth, who ran "G.M.A." from 1986 to 1995, says that there was never a real prospect of management's taking such a drastic step.)

"G.M.A." 's difficulties helped to hide the problems on "Today." After fifteen years in the anchor chair, Gumbel was bored and worn out. Getting up at four in the morning had become a grind, but far more taxing, he says, was "trying to feign attention or interest in something you had zero—zero!—interest in." People at NBC saw an increasingly edgy relationship between Gumbel and Couric. Andrew Lack, the C.E.O. of Sony BMG Music Entertainment, and a former NBC News and network president, says, "Bryant didn't want Katie to help steer the car. I was focussed on 'the "Today" family,' but Bryant couldn't take his hands off the wheel." Gumbel says, "That's simply untrue. We certainly weren't close, but we never had a conflict." Gumbel left the show in 1997; in 1999, he returned to morning television for three years, as the host of CBS's morning show. Since then, he has enjoyed a charmed semi-retirement. He lives in Florida half the year, hosting a monthly show on HBO and playing golf regularly. In the morning, he says, he does not tune in to "Today" or any other morning show; he prefers watching sports and reading newspapers.

Gumbel's replacement was Matt Lauer, who was the news reader on "Today." At first, Lauer assumed the secondary role that Jane Pauley and Deborah Norville had played. He proved himself with a series of interviews, including a painful session with Hillary Clinton. After the allegations surfaced that the President had had an affair with the White House intern Monica Lewinsky, Mrs. Clinton spoke to Lauer of a "vast right-wing conspiracy" that was trying to bring down the President. Lauer and Couric immediately clicked. Couric says, "Ideally, you have a partner you can play with or spar with or disagree with or kid with."

Couric turned forty in January of 1997, and, after six years on "Today," she had every reason to feel happy. She had two daughters, a good marriage, and high ratings. In the spring, however, she learned that her husband had colon cancer. "She was right there, every step of the way, trying to clear obstacles for Jay, looking for every trick," Dr. Mark B. Pochapin, who cared for Jay Monahan, recalls. "She knows as much about colon cancer as my students." In January, 1998, at the age of forty-two, Monahan died. Couric took the next month off, and she returned to "Today" wearing her wedding ring on a chain around her neck. With the support of Zucker, who had recovered from colon cancer several years earlier, she did a weeklong series about the disease, including a live broadcast of her own colonoscopy. She raised a total of five million dollars to establish the Jay Monahan Center, at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. With Lilly Tartikoff, the widow of the one-time NBC Entertainment president Brandon Tartikoff, she organized the National Colorectal Cancer Research Alliance. According to University of Michigan researchers, colonoscopy screenings increased by twenty per cent, a phenomenon they labelled "the Katie Couric effect."



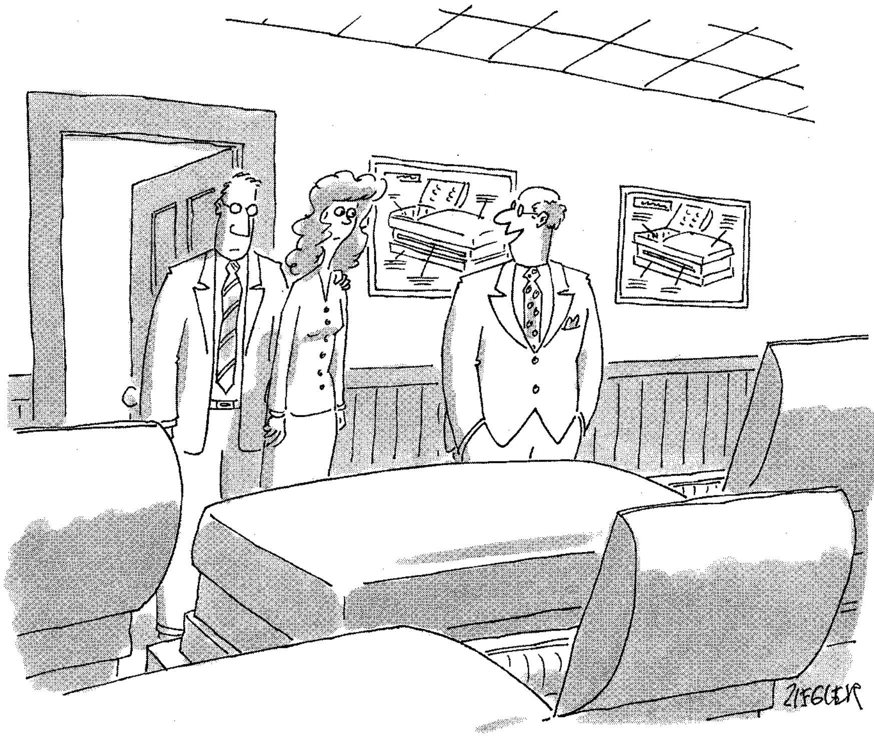
"Bad news, Edward. Your father's lost the castle and the kingdom playing online poker."

When David Westin became the president of ABC News, in 1997, he saw his biggest challenge as fixing "Good Morning America." After wasting thousands of dollars on an outside consultant who recommended hiring Oprah Winfrey—she would never have taken the job—Westin, in 1999, decided on a temporary fix. As "a favor," Diane Sawyer agreed to fill in at "G.M.A." for about three months. Westin asked Shelley Ross, who was a friend of Sawyer's and a senior producer of her magazine show, "Prime-time Live," to become "G.M.A." 's executive producer. Ross, who had been a feature writer and editor at the *National Enquirer*, was known around ABC as "the door knocker," which she says came from the fact that "I always knocked on the door myself." Ross told Sawyer that, by doing the show, she could reveal a warmer side of her personality—"like taking off a too tight dress," as Sawyer puts it.

Gibson, who is sixty-two, needed more coaxing. Like Gumbel, he was tired of getting up early and of the pressure of facing yet another set of guests and "saying to yourself, 'I don't care about what this person has to say.' " Westin called and said to him, "If Diane Sawyer would do it, would you do it?" He was persuaded.

Ross laid out her plan to overtake "Today" in a series of widely circulated memos. She kept saying that she wanted "a touch of humanity from our anchors," some "warm, funny moments between them that are as vital to our success as any booking." She pushed ABC News to offer more stories to "G.M.A.," to be as enterprising for the first half hour of "G.M.A." as it would be for "World News Tonight." Ross also wanted graphic medical-science or true-crime stories that grabbed men "by the tie" and made them late for work. And she wanted what she called a "water-cooler chat," where the anchors talked to each other. When they did, she wanted them to keep in mind their "natural roles." She saw Gibson as "Dad," the show's "patriarch." Sawyer, she said, was "the lover of all culture—high-brow and lowbrow." Tony Perkins, the weatherman, was "the mayor of Times Square, always welcoming." And Robin Roberts, the news reader, was "the best friend." (Roberts was recently promoted to co-anchor.)

Research showed that "G.M.A." 's team was considered to be less warm than the "Today" ensemble. Ross was happy when Gibson talked about what a "doofus" he could be and when Sawyer described why wearing a shirt of her husband's was romantic. (She is married to the director Mike Nichols.) Tom Shales, the television critic of the



"What will it take to put one of you two into a brand-new Eterna-5000 today?"

• •

Washington *Post*, praised the fuzzier new "G.M.A." model: "Sawyer and Gibson are making beautiful music together." Soon, all talk of a three-month experiment ceased. "They both have enjoyed it more than they expected to," Westin says. "They both are very competitive."

In October, 2000, NBC expanded "Today" to a three-hour format, a decision that added seventy million dollars to the program's annual revenues, according to a senior NBC executive. Two months later, Jeff Zucker left "Today" to become president of NBC Entertainment. During the next four years, Zucker was followed by four executive producers. That hurt "Today," and so did Couric's public contract negotiations. In 2001, it was reported that Time Warner and DreamWorks, among others, wanted her to host a syndicated talk show. CBS's "60 Minutes" also pursued her. In the end, Couric signed a five-year, sixty-five-million-dollar contract to stay with "Today," and, soon after that, her agent, Alan Berger, of C.A.A., talked about the negotiations to *People*. The media reported that Couric's thirteen-million-dollar-a-year contract was far and away the richest in the industry. (Not quite. Diane Sawyer makes about twelve million per year, someone who has read her contract told me.) Couric suffered for her vainglory. According to an NBC executive involved in the negotiations, Couric "wanted the numbers out. She was proud. She enjoyed the moment. She felt somewhat validated by it." (Couric emphatically denied that this was so.) The backlash was not unlike what Barbara Walters experienced in 1976, when she left "Today" for ABC and the first million-dollar news contract. "I was called the 'pushy cookie,'" Walters recalls. "Men were called 'assertive.'")

Viewers had empathized with Couric when her husband died, and then when her sister Emily died, of pancreatic cancer, but now her period of mourning was ending and her public image was changing. She even looked different. She closeted her conservative suits and replaced them with leather skirts and summer dresses that showed off her legs and arms, which had been buffed by a personal trainer. She streaked her hair blond and, it seemed, wore a different pair of colored glasses every day. She appeared in fashion spreads for *Vogue*. She began to date, and the celebrity magazines and tabloids carried stories of a serious romance with Tom Werner, a successful Hollywood producer. "I think the statute of limitations on perky ran out about three years ago," she told *Good Housekeeping*. Couric wound up with the sort of problem that had bedevilled Joan Lunden—she became less "relatable" to her audience. Steve Friedman believes that Couric never really got over the death of Jay Monahan. "Ever since then, she's been searching for another partner, and since she hasn't found that partner a lot of the balance is gone," he says. "She has more highs and lows."

Couric also seemed different on the set and in the office. One "Today" staffer told me that Couric's moods affected everyone else: "In the morning, when the anchors go over the copy and make last-minute changes, Couric doesn't say, 'Hey, guys, think we can change this?' Instead, she says, 'This sucks!' Everyone hears it." Bryant Gumbel, in a 1999 *Times Magazine* profile, said, "Somebody who shall remain nameless"—he meant Couric—"went through five" assistants in five years. Couric, to be sure, is the program's star, but some colleagues say she is so self-absorbed that at times she is "tone-deaf" to those around her. They point out, for example, that she is one of the last to arrive on the set, usually at around six-fifteen, and she almost immediately goes into makeup and dominates the room, because the makeup people need to rush to get her ready.

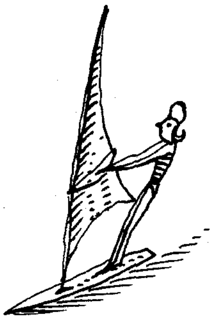
This negative portrait is by no means universal. Joe Michaels, who has been the director of "Today" for a decade, says, "She's just a regular lady. So, when I read stories about her being 'a bitch,' I've never seen it." Andrew Lack, who signed her last contract at NBC, says, "I loved working with her. She's got a producer's head." Couric concedes that she had a number of assistants "who didn't work out," but her current assistant has been with her for four years. She also says, "I've never tried to be über-sexy. I want to age gracefully. At forty-eight now, I've finally lost my baby fat. I want to look nice and feel attractive. That doesn't mean my core values have changed." As for her pay, she says, "I know it's sometimes what people project on me, because I did sign a new contract and they anticipate that I'm going to get haughty and change. It's funny to me, because I grew my hair out and got it lightened for the simple reason that I'm pretty gray and this means I don't have to go to the hairdresser as often."

None of this would merit more than a mention in the gossip columns were it not so important in this high-stakes competition to have an appealing image. That's why the industry pays close attention to the survey research of a Long Island firm called Marketing Evaluations; twice a year, the firm calculates "Q scores"—which measure the familiarity and appeal of news and entertainment figures. In the summer of 2004, Couric had a negative Q of twenty-four, which was not so different from Sawyer's negative Q of twenty-two (or Dan Rather's twenty-three). But Couric's negative Q had gone up twenty per cent in the previous four years, while Sawyer's rose half as quickly. It is not unusual for a personality's negative Q to rise as he or she becomes more familiar, but Couric's rise was unusually rapid. At the same time, ABC's research also showed that Couric's appeal was waning.

In March of 2004, Shelley Ross signed a new three-year contract, but her time at "Good Morning America" was coming to an end. Westin was troubled by staff complaints that Ross didn't listen to people and bullied them, saying things like "Sleep is for sissies!" What really pushed Westin to remove Ross, however, was Charles Gibson's unhappiness with her. Gibson is seen as an essential partner and ballast for Sawyer. "Everyone loves Charlie Gibson," Robin Roberts, who was recruited by Ross, says. "The same cannot be said of Shelley. She was very good to me. She nurtured me. But just because she's nice to you and not as kind to some of the people you work with . . ." She added, "You might as well be ugly to me, too." Gibson insists that he never issued an ultimatum about Ross—"It's not my style," he said in an e-mail. But he acknowledges that he thought "it was time for new leadership," and that, in talking to Westin, "I always made known my frustrations with Shelley, and my admiration for her strengths."

Ross thought that she had an ally in Sawyer, who had worked with her for sixteen years, and Westin certainly did not act without Sawyer's concurrence. (Westin compares Sawyer's role at ABC to that of the queen in a chess game.) Sawyer had given a wedding party at her home on Martha's Vineyard when Westin married Sherrie Rollins. He knew that Sawyer, unlike Couric, rarely expressed anger or criticism directly and relied on a few people, like Ross, to do her bidding. Above all, Westin believed that "G.M.A." could not lose Gibson and still overtake "Today"; even though there was no ultimatum, Westin and Sawyer knew that this was a risk.

In any case, Ross was asked to leave, and return to "Primetime Live." She and Sawyer had a painful private talk, and both women cried. Ross was devastated, the more so since, with Sawyer's encouragement, she had just signed a new contract. Did Ross think that Sawyer didn't really care? "Diane, like most on-air talent, believes all producers are replaceable, because the 'talent' is what matters," a person to whom Ross confided told me. Ross told friends she was surprised to learn that Gibson and others found her impossible to work with. "I think you have to set a vision and on the large stuff you have to repeat it," she said. "I think of it as mentoring." She showed me a folder of e-mails from co-workers, praising her work.



In seeking a replacement for Ross, Westin says, "I was looking for people who could bring her energy" but who would also have "a calming influence." He settled on Ben Sherwood, who had studied as a Rhodes Scholar, had been a producer for "Primetime Live" and a senior producer for "NBC Nightly News," and was the author of two best-selling novels. Once he arrived at "G.M.A.," Sherwood often sounded like a veteran marketer. He would tell Westin, and then repeat to the staff, that the average "G.M.A." viewer is a fifty-four-year-old woman. She has a household income of forty-five thousand dollars and may have teen-age kids at home. He didn't want talking heads from Washington, but he did want short interviews, preferably with females. Off the air, he brought a more collegial atmosphere, and he instituted regular staff meetings.

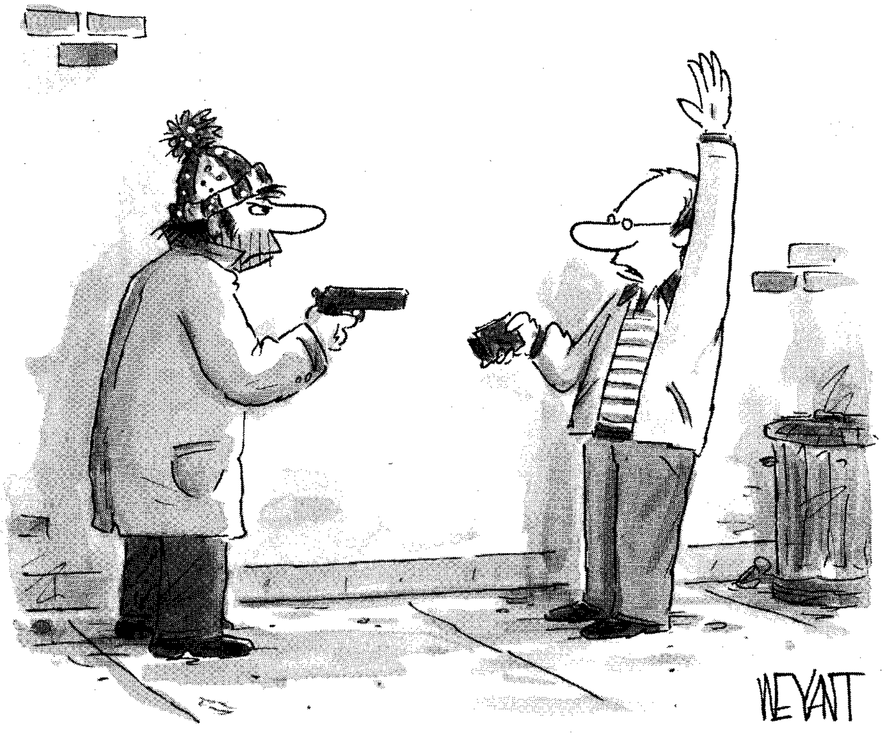
"You really have to ask yourself a philosophical question," Sawyer says. "Is morning—with the kids, with trying to get dressed and trying to get breakfast and worrying that you can't fit in that skirt again—is morning the place that you can absorb a comprehensive look at a complicated issue?" No was the answer that Sawyer was after, but she added, hopefully, "Is morning the place to ask a really smart question?" In Sherwood's first full season as executive producer, "G.M.A." 's ratings continued to improve. Sawyer and Gibson seem genuinely to admire each other; both are rich, happy, and not leaving anytime soon. "Charlie and I every few months wander into each other's office," Sawyer told me, "and we ask: Is it time to leave?" In unison, they say, "Not yet."

In late April of this year, after weeks of rumors, Jeff Zucker fired "Today" 's producer, Tom Touchet. Zucker summed up his view of the program's decline in the ratings: "Our competition has copied everything—every innovation. That's what happens in television." And he blamed the producers, saying that "Today" was "probably not as newsy as it was or I think it should be. It was too soft." He thought that people sensed tension between Lauer and Couric, because the show was too scripted.

Privately, Couric supported a change of producers, as did other "Today" staffers. Nevertheless, stories singled her out for blame in Touchet's dismissal, as she had been blamed for the dismissal of Touchet's predecessor, Jonathan Wald, two years earlier. Couric has denied any direct involvement in either case, but acknowledged that she felt "Today" had been too "news-lite." Touchet told friends that after fourteen years of morning television Couric had become bored, that the camera revealed this, and that, more than once, people heard her say, “I can’t believe I’m still doing this job!” So Touchet had been pushing to begin a transition to a new morning team. Couric had another year on her contract, and he wanted her to help plan her succession; he hoped to induce Lauer to stay for four more years. Couric admits that she has probably said “I can’t believe I’m still doing this job” on more than one occasion, but as an “aside—it’s not my mantra.” Lauer describes Touchet as “a great guy” who was in “an untenable situation.” Lauer organized a farewell dinner for Touchet. Couric did not attend.

For the prime-time season ending in May, NBC became the first network ever to fall from first to fourth place; it lost eleven per cent of its over-all audience and nineteen per cent of viewers between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine. Zucker, who had enjoyed mocking rivals when he was on top, was reduced to selling ads for the 2005-06 season at lower rates than those of the previous year. Neal Shapiro, the president of NBC News, knowing that he was the next to go, said in May that he would step down. But some staffers put the blame elsewhere. “The problem is Katie and, to some extent, Matt,” one senior “Today” staffer told me. “They are bored, and it shows. The best thing that could happen to us is to be No. 2. It would force management to make some changes.”

Lauer, in his office, surrounded by sports memorabilia—he is an obsessive golfer—says, “This, in some ways, is a marriage, and we’ve been married to each other in the morning for eight and one-half years. After eight and one-half years, how many people have the exact same spark of energy and enthusiasm and that same novelty they felt in the second month they were married? Our relationship has evolved. In some ways, it has matured.” He added later, “There is no actual tension.” It’s been reported that Lauer gets angry when Couric goes long in an interview, but he denies this: “It’s frustrating if it’s intentional. That I don’t think.” He is philosophical regarding press stories about battles on the set, saying, “Some days, you’re the dog. Some days, you’re the fire hydrant. Right now, we’re the fire hydrant.” Lauer had in mind Alessandra Stanley’s piece in the *Times*, which was widely read at the networks for its vivid depiction of Couric and of Sawyer’s “creamy insincerity.” Couric, like an actor who insists that she pays no attention to negative reviews, told me, “I didn’t read it. I just knew it was going to be snarky and nasty.” She implied that the portrayal of her as a diva was tinged by an element of sexism. “What’s a male name for diva? *Divo*?” As for Lauer, she said, “I can tell you with complete honesty that my relationship with Matt hasn’t changed at all. We like and care about each other.”

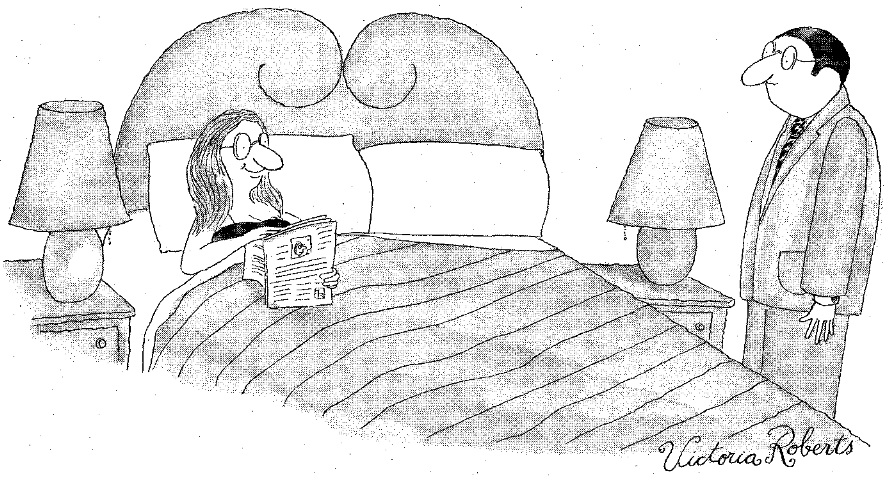


“I assume you need the money to buy a new hat.”

As “Today” fought this spring to hold its top position, Couric began asking colleagues for advice. She was often told to tone down her appearance; by May, her clothes were less flamboyant. Recently, “Today” has seemed less scripted, more relaxed, and more interested in Washington and international stories in the first half hour, while “G.M.A.” has kept its soft-news supremacy, proudly beating “Today” to the story of a sexy Paris Hilton ad for a hamburger chain.

When the veteran sports producer Jim Bell was hired as executive producer, in April, there was grumbling that he lacked a news background; and yet by June the ratings had begun to climb and morale had improved. By the end of June, the “Today” lead over “G.M.A.” was back up to more than five hundred thousand viewers; by mid-July, “Today” had recorded its five-hundredth straight victorious week. ABC executives insist that this is what Ben Sherwood calls “the summer mirage.” In fact, according to Nielsen Media Research, in July “Today” ’s lead over “G.M.A.” was only half what it was at the same time last year. And, unless “Today” has engineered a sudden turnaround, the trend lines continue to favor “G.M.A.” Nielsen’s numbers also show that from September to May “G.M.A.” ’s audience grew by 5.9 per cent over the previous year, while “Today” ’s dropped by 5.3 per cent. (CBS’s “The Early Show,” which is not carried in its entirety by a quarter of its stations, fell by 2.7 per cent.)

David Westin envisions the morning shows as the future of network news. “I think morning television may be an early indication of where a good portion—not all—of television news is headed,” he told me. “By that I mean a balance of male and female, but with more of a female component; more storytelling; and looking at storytelling as a way to access news stories. And the reason I say this is that most of the research I see—I'm sure this is oversimplified—tends to indicate that men and women tend to process news differently. Men tend to like fairly dry factual bullets, and the shorter the better." He anticipated my next question and added, "It doesn't mean 'soft news.' It can be about Iraq, or Social Security. But men and women access the news in different ways." If one regards the morning shows as the laboratory for this storytelling approach, it is easy to see why more resources are poured into "Today" than into the "Nightly News."



"I feel like tearing off all your clothes and putting them in the washing machine."

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Matt Lauer says that you "never get used to it"—meaning the odd hours. Like the other anchors, he stays home most nights and usually goes to sleep by nine. He has two years left on his contract, and he says, "I love this job." His name has been mentioned as a possible evening-news anchor on another network, but he says, "I just don't think that's me. The variety of what I get with this show is great for me." He imagines that after he turns fifty, in three years, he might do what his friend Bryant Gumbel has done, and semi-retire, maybe doing *National Geographic* specials. "I don't want to work five days a week," he says.

Gibson's contract is not up anytime soon, but he keeps an exhausting schedule, doing double duty: as the co-anchor of "G.M.A." and as a frequent substitute for Peter Jennings, who has been ill with lung cancer. It is a measure of how "the center of gravity" has shifted in the news divisions, an ABC executive says, that, if Gibson ever had to choose between the two anchor spots, "I would want him to stay in his current job, and I would want to make him the principal network news anchor, the face of ABC News." Between morning duties and the weekly "Primetime Live," Sawyer, who is now fifty-nine, remains the most influential member of the ABC News ensemble.

Couric's contract expires in May of 2006. "I have, when it's operating on all four cylinders, one of the best jobs in television," she says. "At the same time, everybody needs recharging." She acknowledges that CBS did "reach out" to her this winter to ask whether she might be interested in Dan Rather's anchor job, which is now being filled on a temporary basis by Bob Schieffer, and she has met twice with CBS's chief, Leslie Moonves. Because she is under contract to NBC, she says, it was "a non-starter," though neither she nor Moonves eliminates it as a future option. A syndicated talk show also remains a possibility. This is what her friend Wendy Walker, who is now the executive producer of "Larry King Live," is pushing. She says, "It would be invigorating for her to try something else—a smart syndicated show."

An NBC colleague and friend of Couric's says that the other options would make her personal life more difficult: "She's a single mom. And she likes visiting her daughters' school and going to afternoon soccer games." Zucker says, "Katie has been hugely critical to the success of NBC News and 'Today' for more than a decade, and I am confident she will be so for many, many years to come." Couric says that she will make a decision this fall.

Over a late lunch at a restaurant near her apartment, on the Upper East Side, Couric was relaxed and in good humor. She wore a beige suit over a bright-blue cotton top—"It's from Banana Republic," she made sure to announce. She said it worried her that "hard news" isn't as "appealing" to viewers. But she's not sure whether journalists or the public are to blame. "Are we giving people what they want?" she asked. "Or are people watching what we give them?" She went on, "I think you can anesthetize people into wanting more serious things, perhaps. Sometimes people get programmed not to want more serious stuff. I always felt it was our responsibility as journalists to explore issues and talk about subjects and have serious stories that people need to know about to be informed citizens." Weeks after she delivered these solemn remarks, NBC boasted that Couric had persuaded the "runaway bride" to have her first interview. NBC and Couric offered a one-hour special on the woman in prime time on June 21st. Judged by the ratings—NBC came in first in that hour, doubling its normal viewership—Couric had scored a coup. "Today" featured the story for two days.

"I thought the runaway bride was a terrific story," Couric told me later. "It was the subject of water-cooler conversation for almost a week, and I think people were very curious about who Jennifer Wilbanks was and what her motivations were. I was very proud of that interview, and the piece as a whole. I thought it was honest and very well produced, and, while it may not have been a documentary on Iraq, I do think there is room for all kinds of news, as long as you don't scrape the bottom of the barrel. And the runaway-bride story passed my internal litmus test of what would be newsy and entertaining." The roots of "Today" and of morning television—news programs where a chimpanzee is not entirely out of place—were still showing. ♦

FICTION

GÓMEZ PALACIO

BY ROBERTO BOLAÑO

I went to Gómez Palacio during one of the worst periods of my life. I was twenty-three years old and I knew that my days in Mexico were numbered.

My friend Montero, who worked for the Arts Council, had found me a stint teaching a writing workshop in that town, with its hideous name. First, to warm up, I had to tour the other writing workshops the Arts Council had established throughout the region. A bit of a holiday in the north to start off, Montero said, then you can get down to work in Gómez Palacio and forget all your problems. I don't know why I accepted. I knew that under no circumstances would I settle down in Gómez Palacio. I knew that I wouldn't stick to running a writing workshop in some godforsaken town in northern Mexico.

I left Mexico City one morning on a bus packed to capacity and began my tour. I went to San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, León—though probably not in that order. I can't remember which town came first or how long I spent in each. Then Torreón and Saltillo. I went to Durango as well.

Finally, I arrived in Gómez Palacio and visited the Arts Council offices, where I met my future students. In spite of the heat, I couldn't stop shivering. The director, a plump, middle-aged woman with bulging eyes, wearing a large print dress featuring almost all of the state's native flowers, took me to my lodgings: a seedy motel on the edge of town, next to a highway leading nowhere.

She used to pick me up herself every morning. She had an enormous sky-blue car, which she drove perhaps too boldly, though generally speaking she wasn't a bad driver. It was an automatic, and her feet barely reached the pedals. Invariably, the first thing we did was stop at a roadside restaurant that was visible in the distance from the motel, a reddish bump on the blue-and-yellow horizon. There we breakfasted on orange juice and Mexican-style eggs, followed by several cups of coffee, all paid for (I presume) with Arts Council vouchers—not cash, in any case.

Then she would lean back in her chair and talk about her life in that northern town; her poetry, which had been published by a small local press subsidized by the Arts Council; and her husband, who didn't understand the poet's calling or the suffering it entailed. Meanwhile, I chain-smoked Bali cigarettes and looked out the window at the highway, thinking about the disaster that was my life. Then we'd get back into her car and head off to the main office of the Arts Council, a two-story building whose only redeeming feature was an unpaved yard with three trees and an abandoned, or unfinished, garden, swarming with zombie-like adolescents, who were studying painting, music, or literature. The first time I was there, I hardly noticed the yard. The second time, it made me shudder. None of this makes any sense, I thought, but deep down I knew that it did make sense and that was what I found unbearably sad, to use a rather hyperbolic expression, though it seemed perfectly accurate at the time. Maybe I was confusing sense with necessity. Maybe I was just a nervous wreck.

I found it hard to get to sleep at night. I had nightmares. Before going to bed, I would make sure the door and the windows of my room were securely and tightly shut. My throat always felt dry, and the only solution was to drink water. I was continually getting up and going to the bathroom to refill my glass. Since I was up, I would check the door and the windows again to see that they were properly shut. Sometimes I forgot my fears and stayed at the window, looking at the desert stretching off into the dark. Then I went back to bed and closed my eyes, but having drunk so much water I soon had to get up again to urinate. And since I was up I would check all the locks and then stand listening to the distant sounds of the desert (the muffled hum of cars heading north or south) and looking out of the window at the night. And so on until dawn, when I could finally get some unbroken sleep, two or three hours at most.

On my last full day, while we were having breakfast, the director asked about my eyes. It's because I don't sleep much, I said. Yes, they're bloodshot, she said, and changed the subject. That afternoon, as she was taking me back to the motel, she asked if I would like to drive for a bit. I don't know how to drive, I said. She burst out laughing and pulled onto the shoulder. A white refrigerated truck went past. I managed to read what was written on the side in large blue letters: "THE WIDOW PADILLA'S MEAT." The truck had Monterrey license plates and the driver stared at us with a curiosity that struck me as excessive. The director opened her door and got out. Get in the driver's seat, she said. I obeyed. She got into the passenger seat and ordered me to go.

I drove along the gray strip of highway connecting Gómez Palacio and the motel. When I reached the motel, I didn't stop. I looked over at the director: she was smiling—she didn't mind if I drove a bit farther. Until then, both of us had stared at the highway in silence. But when the motel was behind us she started talking about her poetry, her work, and her insensitive husband. When she had said her piece, she turned on the cassette player and put in a tape: a woman singing *rancheras*. The singer had a sad voice that was always a couple of notes ahead of the orchestra. I'm her friend, the director said. What? I said. She's a close friend of mine, the director said. Ah. She's from Durango, she said. You've been there, haven't you? Yes, I've been to Durango, I said. And what were the writing workshops like? Worse than the ones here, I replied, meaning it as a compliment, although she didn't seem to take it that way. She's from Durango, but she lives in Ciudad Juárez, she said. Sometimes, when she's going back home to see her mother, she calls me up and I reorganize my schedule so I can go to Durango and spend a few days with her. That's nice, I said, keeping my eyes on the road. I stay at her house—her mother's house, actually, the director said. The two of us sleep in her room and spend hours talking and listening to records. Every now and then, one of us goes to the kitchen to make coffee. I usually take cookies with me, La Regalada cookies, her favorite. And we drink coffee and eat cookies. We've known each other since we were fifteen. She's my best friend.

On the horizon I could see the highway disappearing into the hills. Night was beginning to approach from the east. Days before, at the motel, I had asked myself, What color is the desert at night? A stupid question, yet somehow I

ART + COMMERCE ANTHOLOGY

felt it held the key to my future, or perhaps not so much my future as my capacity for suffering. One afternoon, at the writing workshop in Gómez Palacio, a boy asked me why I wrote poetry and how long I thought I would go on doing it. The director wasn't present. There were five students in the workshop: four boys and a girl. You could tell from the way they dressed that two of them were very poor. The girl was short and thin and her clothes were garish. The boy who asked the question should have been studying at a university; instead, he was working in a soap factory, the biggest and probably the only soap factory in the state. Another boy was a waiter in an Italian restaurant, the other two were in college, and the girl was neither studying nor working.

By chance, I replied. For a while, none of us said anything. I considered the possibility of taking a job in Gómez Palacio and staying there for the rest of my life. I had noticed a pair of pretty girls among the painting students in the yard. With a bit of luck, I might have managed to marry one of them. The prettier one also seemed to be the more conventional. I imagined a long, complicated engagement. I imagined a dark, cool house and a garden full of plants. And how long do you think you'll go on writing? the boy who worked in the soap factory asked again. I could have said anything, but opted for simplicity. I don't know, I said. What about you? I started writing because poetry sets me free, sir, and I'm never going to stop, he said, with a smile that barely hid his pride and determination. As an answer, it was too vague and declamatory to be convincing, yet somehow it gave me a glimpse of the factory worker's life, not as it was then but as it had been when he was fifteen, or maybe twelve. I saw him running or walking through the outskirts of Gómez Palacio, under a sky that looked like a rockslide. I saw his friends and wondered how they could possibly survive. Yet, one way or another, they probably had.

Then we read some poems. The only one who had any talent was the girl. But by then I wasn't sure of anything. When we came out of the classroom, the director was waiting with two guys who turned out to be civil servants employed by the state of Durango. My first thought was: They're policemen, here to arrest me. The kids said goodbye and off they went, the skinny girl with one of the boys and the other three on their own. I followed them down the hallway with its peeling walls, as if I had forgotten to say something to one of them. From the door I saw them disappear at both ends of that street in Gómez Palacio.

The director said, She's my best friend. That was all. The highway was no longer a straight line. In the rearview mirror I could see an enormous wall rising beyond the town. It took me a while to realize it was the night. The singer on the cassette began to warble another song. The lyrics were about a remote village in the north of Mexico. where everyone was happy except her. I had the impression that the director was crying. Silent, dignified, unstoppable tears. But I couldn't confirm this impression. I had to keep my eyes on the road. The director took out a handkerchief and blew her nose. Turn the headlights on, I heard her say in a barely audible voice. I kept driving.

Turn on the headlights, she repeated, and without waiting for a response she leaned over and did it herself. Slow down, she said after a while, her voice stronger now, as the singer reached the final notes of her song. What a sad song, I said, just for something to say.

I stopped the car by the side of the road and got out. It wasn't yet completely dark, but it was no longer day. The land all around us and the hills into which the highway stretched were a deep, intense shade of yellow that I have never seen anywhere else. As if the light (though it seemed to me not so much light as pure color) were charged with something, I didn't know what, but it might well have been eternity. I was immediately embarrassed to have had such a thought. I stretched my legs. A car whizzed past, honking its horn. I told him where to go with a gesture. Maybe it wasn't just a gesture. Maybe I yelled, Go fuck yourself, and the driver saw or heard me. But it's unlikely, like most things in this story. In any case, when I think about the driver all I can see is my own image frozen in his rearview mirror: my hair is still long; I'm thin, wearing a denim jacket and a pair of awful, oversize glasses.

The car pulled up several metres in front of us. The driver didn't get out or back up or honk the horn again, but his mere presence strained the space that we were now, in some sense, sharing. Cautiously, I walked around to the director's side of the car. She rolled down her window and asked me what had happened. Her eyes were bulging more than ever. I said I didn't know. It's a man, she said, and slid across into the driver's seat. I got into the seat she had left. It was hot and moist, as if she had a fever. Through the windshield I could see the man's silhouette; like us, he was facing forward, toward the line of the highway beginning to wind its way through the hills.

It's my husband, the director said with her eyes fixed on the stationary car, as if she were talking to herself. Then she flipped the cassette over and turned up the volume. Sometimes my friend calls me up, she said, when she's touring in towns she doesn't know. Once, she called from Ciudad Madero. She'd been singing all night at the Oil Workers Union building and she called me at four in the morning. Another time she called from Reinosa. That's nice, I said. Not especially, the director said. She just calls. Sometimes she needs to talk. If my husband answers, she hangs up.

For a while, neither of us said anything. I imagined the director's husband with the telephone in his hand. He picks up the telephone, says, Hello, who is it? Then he hears someone hang up at the other end and he hangs up, too, almost by reflex. I asked the director if she wanted me to get out and say something to the driver of the other car. There's no need, she said. Which seemed a reasonable answer to me, although in fact it was crazy. I asked what her husband was going to do, if it really was her husband. He'll stay there until we go, the director said. Then we'd better go now, I said. The director seemed to be lost in thought, though later it occurred to me that maybe all she was doing was closing her eyes and listening to her friend from Durango, drinking that song down to the very last drop. Then she turned on the ignition, pulled out slowly, and passed the car. I looked out the window as we went by, but the driver turned his back to us and I couldn't see his face.

Are you sure it was your husband? I asked as we sped off again toward the hills. No, the director said, and started laughing. I don't think it was. I started laughing, too. The car looked like his, she said, almost choking with laughter, but it probably wasn't him. So it might have been? I said. Not unless he's changed his license plates, the director said. At which point I understood that the whole thing had been a joke. I shut my eyes. Then we came out of the hills and into the desert: a plain swept by the headlights of cars heading north or back toward Gómez Palacio. It was already night.

Now we're coming to a very special place, the director said. Those were her words: very special.

I wanted you to see this, she said proudly. This is one of my favorite things. She pulled over and stopped in a sort of rest area, although it was really no more than a patch of ground big enough for trucks to park on. Lights were sparkling in the distance: a town or a restaurant. We didn't get out. The director pointed toward something—a stretch of highway that must have been about five kilometres away, maybe less, maybe more. She even wiped the inside of the windshield with a cloth so I could see better. I looked: I saw the headlights of cars. From the way the beams of light were swivelling, there must have been a bend in the highway. And then I saw some green shapes in the desert. Did you see? the director asked. Yes, lights, I replied. The director looked at me: her bulging eyes gleamed, as do, no doubt, the eyes of the small mammals native to the inhospitable environs of Gómez Palacio, in the state of Durango. Then I looked again in the direction she had indicated. At first, I couldn't see anything, only darkness, the sparkling lights of that restaurant or town. Some cars passed and the beams of their headlights carved the space in two. Their progress was exasperatingly slow, but we were beyond exasperation.

And then I saw how the light, seconds after the car or truck had passed that spot, turned back on itself and hung in the air, a green light that seemed to breathe, alive and aware for a fraction of a second in the middle of the desert, set free, a marine light, moving like the sea but with all the fragility of earth, a green, prodigious, solitary light that must have been produced by something near that curve in the road—a sign, the roof of an abandoned shed, huge sheets of plastic spread on the ground—but that, to us, appeared to be a dream or a miracle, which comes to the same thing in the end.

Then the director started the car, turned it around, and drove back to the motel.

I was to leave for Mexico City the next day. When we got back to the motel, the director got out of the car and walked with me part of the way. Before we got to my room, she held out her hand and said goodbye. I know you'll forgive my eccentricities, she said. After all, we both read poetry. I was grateful she hadn't said we were both poets. When I got to my room, I switched on the light, took off my jacket, and drank some water straight from the tap. Then I went to the window. Her car was still in the parking lot. I opened the door and was hit in the face by a gust of desert air. The car was empty. A little farther off, beside the highway, I saw the director, who looked as if she were contemplating a river or the landscape of another planet. The way she was standing, with her arms slightly raised, she might have been talking to the air or reciting, or playing statues, like a little girl.

I didn't sleep well. At dawn, the director came to fetch me. She took me to the bus station and told me that if I ever wanted to come back I would be very welcome at the workshop. I said I would have to think about it. She said that was fine, best to think things over. Then she said, A hug. I bent down and hugged her. The seat I had been given was on the other side of the bus, so I didn't see her leave. The last thing I remember, vaguely, is her standing there, looking at the bus, or perhaps at her watch. Then I had to sit down so the other passengers could get past, and when I looked again she was gone. ♦

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Chris Andrews.*)

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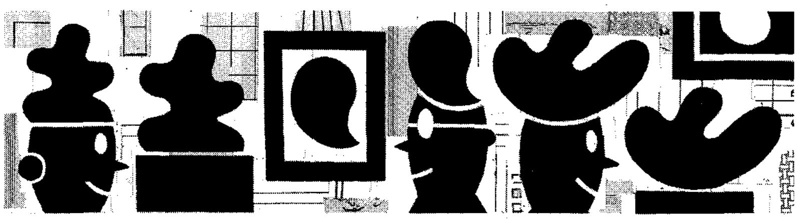

A CRITIC AT LARGE

MISSIONARY

Edmund Wilson and American culture.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Edmund Wilson disliked being called a critic. He thought of himself as a journalist, and nearly all his work was done for commercial magazines, principally *Vanity Fair*, in the nineteen-twenties; *The New Republic*, in the nineteen-twenties and thirties; *The New Yorker*, beginning in the nineteen-forties; and *The New York Review of Books*, in the nineteen-sixties. Most of his books were put together from pieces that had been written to meet journalistic occasions. He was exceptionally well read: he had had a first-class education in English, French, and Italian literature at Princeton, from which he graduated in 1916, and he kept adding languages all his life. He learned to read German, Russian, and Hebrew; when he died, in 1972, he was working on Hungarian. He was also an extremely fast and an extremely clear writer, talents that, in the magazine business, are prized above many others, and that would have made up for a number of shortcomings if he had had shortcomings to make up for. These strengths, along with an ingrained indifference to material comforts, allowed him, from almost the beginning of his career, to write about only the subjects he wanted to write about.

Wilson had no interest in criticism as such. He wrote a few essays about the critical literature that had influenced him—Marxist and historical interpretation—but he paid little attention to the criticism being written by his contemporaries unless they were good writers themselves, in which case he read their criticism as a form of literature, which is how he preferred to read everything. He detested what he called "treatise-type" books—theoretical or social-scientific works—and avoided them, unless, again, they seemed to him to have literary or imaginative power. He read Marx but not Weber; he read Orwell but not Hannah Arendt. It was his practice, when he took up an author, to read the whole shelf: books, uncollected pieces, biographies, correspondence. When he lost patience with a book, he skipped around, and what he ignored he ignored without shame. "I have been bored by Hispanophiles," he wrote in *The New Yorker* in 1965, "and I have also been bored by everything, with the exception of Spanish painting, that I have ever known about Spain. I have made a point of learning no Spanish, and I have never got through 'Don Quixote.'" Though he wrote well-known essays on Dickens and on Henry James, he was uninterested in most Victorian fiction and didn't bother to finish "Middlemarch." He had a good knowledge of the theatre (he wrote a number of plays, and his first wife, Mary Blair, was in the Provincetown Players, Eugene O'Neill's company); he had a selective knowledge of art, a very selective knowledge of classical music, and virtually no knowledge of the movies. He loathed the radio.

"A history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which have shaped them": this was the way Wilson described his ambition in his first major book, "Axel's Castle," in 1931 (the words appear in a dedication to his Princeton mentor Christian Gauss), and he was always keenly conscious of the conditions that had shaped his own ideas and imaginings. He liked to say that he was a man of the nineteenth century—he was born in 1895, in Red Bank, New Jersey—and to explain that his values and assumptions, his whole understanding of literary and intellectual life, were products of a particular moment. Because "Axel's Castle" has served many readers as a guide to the work of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Valéry, Proust, and Stein, the book's six subjects, it is natural to associate Wilson with the literary modernism that flourished between 1910 and 1930. This is a fundamental misapprehension. Wilson was not a modernist (a term he despised), as the conventional style of his own poetry and fiction makes plain. He admired the writers he treated in "Axel's Castle"—Joyce and Proust especially—but he believed that they were going down a path of introversion and art-for-art's-sake, an honorable path but a wrong one, and his hope in writing about them was that the scope and sophistication of their achievement would be an inspiration for the more socially engaged American writing he envisioned for the decades to come. Wilson was not shaped by European modernism; he enlisted European modernism in a mission already mounted—the mission to deprovincialize American culture.

Wilson came out of the Progressive era. His father was the New Jersey state attorney general under Governor Woodrow Wilson; before his career was wrecked by what was then called neurasthenia (meaning, essentially, male hysteria), he made a name for himself by cleaning up the rackets in Atlantic City. At Princeton, Wilson was taught about the necessary virtue of cosmopolitanism by Gauss, a professor of Romance languages and, later, a dean, who had known Wilde, and who had a dog called Baudelaire. When the United States entered the war, Wilson enlisted and served in Europe as a wound-dresser in Army hospitals, an experience, he later said, that knocked any social élitism or sense of privilege out of him forever. In 1920, he began his journalistic career, with a job at *Vanity Fair*, followed, soon afterward, by a position at the magazine that was born of Progressivism, *The New Republic*, where he was an editor, off and on, for many years, and where the essays in "Axel's Castle" first appeared. By then, Wilson had

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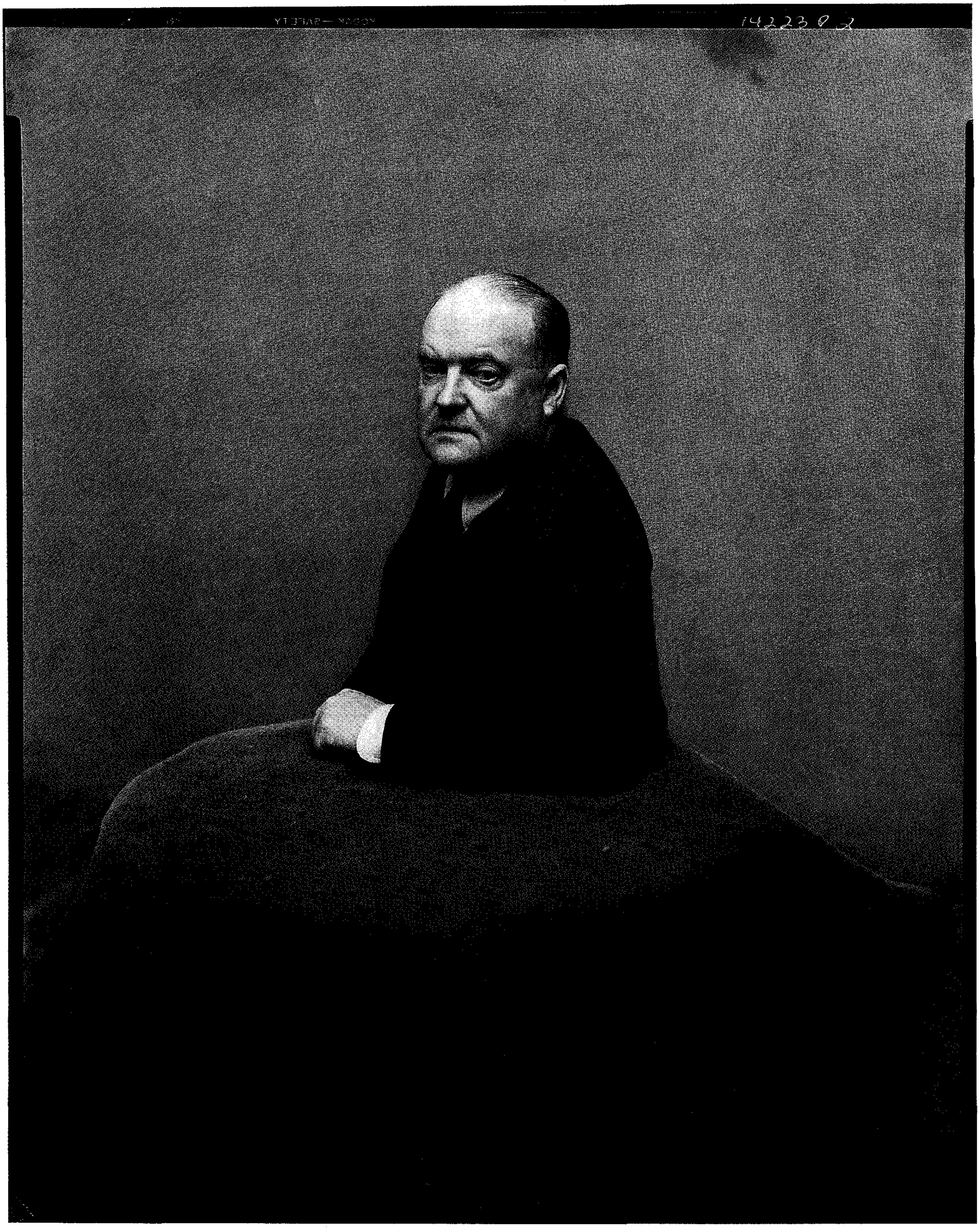

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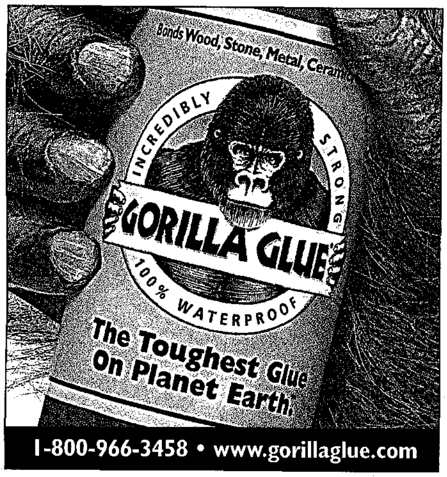
E. E. Cummings called Wilson "the man in the iron necktie," but his writing was more organized than his life.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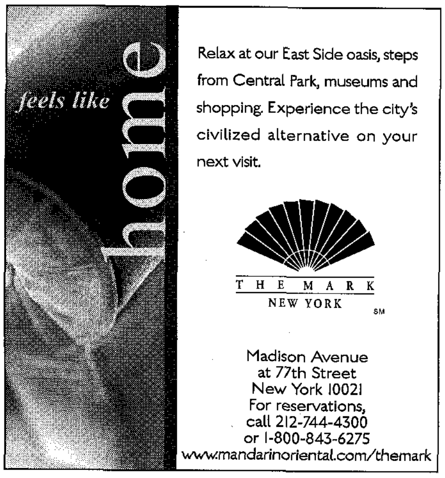
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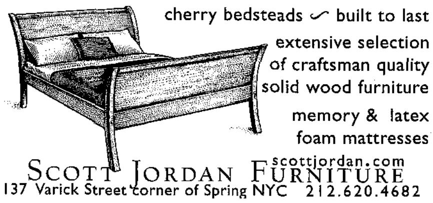
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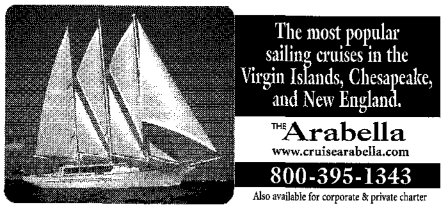
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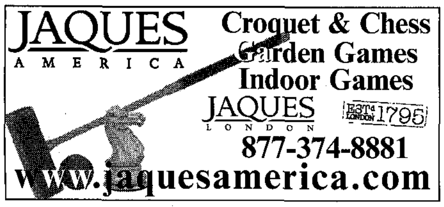
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firmly in his sights the twin enemies of every Progressive intellectual: unregulated business and the genteel tradition. His vicars were not Proust and Eliot; they were H. L. Mencken and George Bernard Shaw, scourges of bourgeois smugness and Philistinism. Wilson hated American chauvinism and gentility, and everything he associated with them—prudery, pedantry, commercialism, and militarism. That hatred is the starch in his prose.

Wilson's professional life has three chapters. In the beginning, he was a player in the drama that he wrote about, a commentator on times that he was helping to shape. He not only explained contemporary writing in "Axel's Castle"; he knew and advised many contemporary writers, among them Fitzgerald (a Princeton classmate and close friend), Dos Passos (another close friend), Hemingway, Cummings, Bogan, Millay, Farrell, Nabokov. He published Eliot in *Vanity Fair;* he met Joyce in Paris. His other big book of this period, "To the Finland Station" (1940), explained the Marxist revolutionary tradition. In the decade during which he worked on the book, Wilson reported on the condition of life in the Depression (his pieces were published as "The American Jitters," in 1932); he engaged in political activities and drew up a radical manifesto; he guided the editorial direction of *The New Republic* until the magazine's loyalty to Stalin drove him away. He published two major collections, "The Triple Thinkers" (1938) and "The Wound and the Bow" (1941); a number of the essays in them—on Dickens, James, Wharton, Kipling, Pushkin, and Flaubert—changed the reputations of their subjects.

The books and essays of this phase have a special charge, given to them by Wilson's notion of writing as an arena where there is the possibility of heroic performance—and by the hope, or the desire, that his own books and essays might be performances of this kind. Many of them were read that way. Alfred Kazin, whose first book, "On Native Grounds," was passionately indebted to Wilson's prose, and his friend Richard Hofstadter used to read aloud to each other the famous ending of the chapter on Proust in "Axel's Castle":

> Proust is perhaps the last great historian of the loves, the society, the intelligence, the diplomacy, the literature and the art of the Heartbreak House of capitalist culture; and the little man with the sad appealing voice, the metaphysician's mind, the Saracen's beak, the ill-fitting dress-shirt and the great eyes that seem to see all about him like the many-faceted eyes of a fly, dominates the scene and plays host in the mansion where he is not long to be master.

The tribute to Hemingway—in an essay, in "The Wound and the Bow," that was so critical, in parts, that Hemingway threatened to file a lawsuit over it—produces the same sort of effect:

> Hemingway has expressed with genius the terrors of the modern man at the danger of losing control of his world, and he has also, within his scope, provided his own kind of antidote. This antidote, paradoxically, is almost entirely moral. Despite Hemingway's preoccupation with physical contests, his heroes are almost always defeated physically, nervously, practically: their stories are moral ones. He himself, when he trained himself stubbornly in his unconventional unmarketable art in a Paris which had other fashions, gave the prime example of such a victory; and if he has sometimes, under the menace of the general panic, seemed on the point of going to pieces as an artist, he has always pulled himself together the next moment. The principle of the Bourdon gauge, which is used to measure the pressure of liquids, is that a tube which has been curved into a coil will tend to straighten out in proportion as the liquid inside it is subjected to an increasing pressure.

And there is the one-sentence paragraph that comes at the end of the terrible catalogue, in "To the Finland Station," of the misfortunes and the deaths of Marx, his wife, and their children:

> Such pain and such effort it cost to build a stronghold for the mind and the will outside the makeshifts of human society.

It was an entire generation's romance of Marxism in a sentence.

Then, around 1945, Wilson walked out of the arena. Many of his literary friends had died or were, creatively, past it; possibly the chronic catfight that was his third marriage, to Mary McCarthy, wore him down. ("Two tyrants under a single roof" is how one writer described them. They were married for seven years, and separated in 1945.) He continued to review for *The New Yorker* and to maintain extensive literary and intellectual friendships. But he abandoned his dream of a great American culture. He had imagined himself a soldier in the struggle to create a literature that could stand on equal terms with the literatures of Europe, and he had always, at heart, imagined that one writer in particular would fulfill this hope. That writer was Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald’s burnout and death seemed to confirm, for Wilson, everything that Shaw and Mencken had predicted about the fate of culture under bourgeois capitalism. “There has come a sort of break in the literary movement that was beginning to feel its first strength in the years 1912-1916, at the time I was in college at Princeton: the movement on which I grew up and with which I afterwards worked,” Wilson wrote in 1944, four years after Fitzgerald’s death. Writers had been corrupted, he believed, by “the two great enemies of literary talent in our time: Hollywood and Henry Luce.” It was not that the movement had died. It had never happened.

Disaffection became Wilson’s customary response to contemporary life and literature. He claimed, only a little hyperbolically, that the only American novelist whose work he followed was J. D. Salinger. In his journalism, he turned to the old, the marginal, the neglected, and the obscure. The period begins with his reporting for *The New Yorker* from the ruins of Europe, collected in “Europe Without Baedeker” (1947), and includes “The Scrolls from the Dead Sea” (1955); “Red, Black, Blond, and Olive. Studies in Four Civilizations: Zuñi, Haiti, Soviet Russia, Israel” (1956); “Apologies to the Iroquois” (1960); the third of the major works, “Patriotic Gore” (1962), a study of the literature of the American Civil War, most of it by minor writers; a book on Canadian literature, “O Canada” (1965); and “A Window on Russia for the Use of Foreign Readers” (1972). There are also two classic cases of late-life peevishness: “The Cold War and the Income Tax” (1963), which arose out of Wilson’s failure to file income-tax returns from 1946 to 1955, an act of carelessness to which he attempted to give the glow of principle; and “The Fruits of the MLA,” a two-part article for *The New York Review of Books* designed to vaporize a harmless and well-intentioned cottage industry, the publication of scholarly editions. (The articles did prepare the way for the Library of America, an enterprise that Wilson conceived.)

In his last years, he turned to autobiography, and this marks the third phase of his career, much of which is posthumous. Wilson completed two volumes of memoirs, “A Prelude” (1967), covering his life through the First World War, and “Upstate” (1971), about Talcottville, a remote New York town, where he spent part of the year alone in an old house that had belonged to his family. (His fourth wife, Elena, called the area a “kingdom of asbestos shingle and patched and mended asbestos shingle,” and she refused to spend much time there.) Five more autobiographical volumes appeared after Wilson’s death, each named for a decade, beginning with “The Twenties” (1975). That’s seven volumes, and they are not slim. “The Fifties” (1986) is six hundred and sixty-three pages; “The Sixties” (1993) is nine hundred and sixty-eight. A volume of selected correspondence, “Letters on Literature and Politics,” came out in 1977, edited by Elena Wilson, with the assistance of Daniel Aaron. It is the best window on Wilson and his times, and one of the great editions of twentieth-century letters.

Unlike some posthumous productions, the memoirs are not merchandise cobbled together by the estate. Wilson wanted them published, and he engaged a distinguished biographer, Leon Edel, to handle the job after his death (against the recommendation of Roger Straus, Wilson’s publisher, who thought, given the material, that Edel was too much of a prude). Wilson’s model, apparently, was Casanova’s “Memoirs,” the subject of an essay in “The Wound and the Bow”; he may also have had in mind the journals of Gide and the Goncourts. His books are not in that class. Their chief problem—to invoke what, under the circumstances, seems the fair standard—is that they do not read as literature. They are drawn mostly from Wilson’s notebooks, which he used as, simultaneously, a diary, a verbal sketchbook, a repository for anecdotes and recollected party talk, and a reporter’s notebook. A lot of the diary entries reappeared in Wilson’s fiction, “I Thought of Daisy” (1929) and “Memoirs of Hecate County” (1946); a lot of the reporting reappeared in books like “Travels in Two Democracies” (1936), about his first visit to the Soviet Union, and “Apologies to the Iroquois.” Though Wilson obviously planned all along to make the journals public, since he used pseudonyms when writing about his affairs, they

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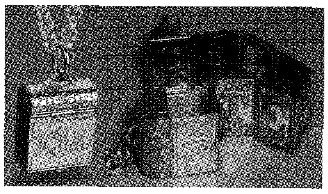

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are mostly unprocessed notes. They need someone like Wilson to explain what it all means.

This last phase of publication has made things difficult for biographers. A life of Wilson by Jeffrey Meyers came out in 1995. A new one, by Lewis Dabney, more than twenty years in the making, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this summer. A much shorter book, called "Critic in Love: A Romantic Biography of Edmund Wilson," by David Castronovo and Janet Groth, is scheduled to appear in the fall. A biography of a highly guarded writer—Saul Bellow, for example—has an obvious appeal, since there are self-presentations to unravel and secrets to reveal. But Wilson was one of the most unguarded of men. He was often brusque and aloof with people, but he spoke his mind, sometimes imprudently and frequently in print; and in his diaries he does not seem to have censored much. Unlike, say, Bellow, he gave no time or consideration to the project of crafting a personality. Kazin once teased Wilson about wearing a dress shirt when he went to the beach in Wellfleet, which is where he spent the parts of the year that he was not in Talcottville. "I have only one way of dressing," Wilson said. It is a challenge, in other words, to find much to say about Wilson's private life that has remained, in fact, private.

But the autobiographical phase can't just be lopped off from the rest of the œuvre. Wilson's life was one of Wilson's subjects, and he must have intended that later readers would take him the way he took Proust and Marx and Casanova—as a historical figure, the critical reflector of an age. The disorderliness of the life is almost the reverse image of the work, which is so assured and direct, but it does tell us a few things, one of which is that Wilson's hostility to gentility and institutional authority was not a literary affectation. He was, in his way, a bohemian, though a bohemian with many firm opinions—"the man in the iron necktie," Cummings called him. After his separation from Mary Blair, in 1925, Wilson became involved with a taxi-dancer, whom he picked up in a dance hall on Fourteenth Street. Her name was Frances Minihan; she was the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants, and married to a car thief. She is Anna in Wilson's great, unnerving story of erotic obsession, "The Princess with the Golden Hair," published in "Memoirs of Hecate County"—a woman who was completely outside his social and professional circles, and with whom he seems to have had a uniquely uncomplicated and loving, though ultimately impossible, relationship. Wilson's second wife, Margaret Canby, died, in a fall at a party, in 1932. They had been married for two years, and lived part of the time, for various reasons, on opposite sides of the continent. The marriage to McCarthy was a mistake that neither side wanted to be first to admit. When they fought, he would retreat into his study and lock the door; she would set piles of paper on fire and try to push them under it. Wilson's fourth marriage, to Elena Mumm Thornton, came closest to conventional domesticity, but they did not live all the year together, and Wilson still pursued other women, with whom he achieved varying degrees of sexual intimacy.

Wilson was an intent observer of anatomical detail, and he left written records of quite a few pudenda. There is something chilling about the records, and there could be something chilling about the man who made them. It is the opposite of arousing to read Wilson's description of sex with the unhappy Penelope Gilliatt in the Princeton Club in 1970, when he was seventy-five. But although these passages are not usually moving to read, they represent a moving element in Wilson's personality. Wilson was not a sexual conquistador. He adored the women he had affairs with; and though he struggled and fought with his wives, he loved them. One of the things we learn from Dabney's book is that on Valentine's Day Wilson sent homemade valentines to the women in his life. He was, with them and other close friends, Bunny—a nickname that his mother gave him, and which, despite initial resistance and some obvious incongruousness, he sweetly adopted.

The women and the sex were important to Wilson because everything else in his life was often a mess. He had three children, each from a different marriage. He moved a lot, usually from one shabby rented place to another, and, thanks to the divorces and, later, the negligence about taxes, money was a serious problem right up to the end. He was a functioning alcoholic but an angry drunk (one cause of the problems in the early marriages). His figure was not prepossessing. He was five-six and, by early middle age, stout and habitually short of breath. Isaiah Berlin was startled to meet him, in 1946, when Wilson was fifty-one: a "thick-set, red-faced, pot-bellied figure not unlike President Hoover." His voice was described by contemporaries as a shrill boom, and he was uneasy in a classroom and a dreadful pub-

"Baby! Come look at this huge brick of drug money the kids found washed up on the beach!"

lic speaker (as he was aware). When it came to most physical activities, he was inept. He did not, for instance, know how to drive a car. But he was an ardent lover. Sex seems to have been one place where he felt natural and in control, a zone of wholeness in a world that, for him, was characterized mostly by tension, rupture, and decay. The other place he must have felt that way, of course, was his writing.

People have sometimes looked in that writing for the wrong things. In 1948, Stanley Edgar Hyman published a book on criticism called "The Armed Vision," which begins with a chapter on Wilson. Hyman was a *New Yorker* writer who contributed to the Talk of the Town section; he also was a professor at Bennington. The argument of his book was that contemporary critics had developed "a formal methodology and system of procedures that can be objectively transmitted" and that were turning literary study into a science. Wilson figured in the book as an unscientific primitive.

Hyman's discussion of Wilson's work suggests an obsession, the kind nursed by a writer who knows himself to have a superior intellect, a person whose teachers have always told him how smart he is, and who cannot understand why everyone is reading this mere plot summarizer who has never bothered to rigorously interrogate the philosophical underpinnings of his discourse. What readers evidently don't realize, Hyman continually seems to be saying, is that educated people already know this stuff. Wilson's indifference to theory and methodology "is merely another evidence that the attempt to interpret, 'translate,' and promote major literature on no more solid a basis than sharp reading and eclecticism cannot result in more than flashes of insight at its best and in the shoddy popularization of '100 Great Books Digested' at its worst." He also accused Wilson of borrowing from the work of other scholars and critics without acknowledgment.

The plagiarism charge was nonsense. Wilson wrote the first American review of "The Waste Land"—after the poem had appeared in *The Dial* but before Eliot published the notes in the book edition which have guided interpreters ever since—and he wrote one of the first reviews anywhere of "Ulysses." Wilson did not borrow from anyone when he wrote those reviews because there was, at the time, no one to borrow from. The reviews were the basis for the chapters on Eliot and Joyce, nine years later, in "Axel's Castle," and they are still remarkable for the accuracy and clarity of the analysis. Wilson had access to Joyce's private "schema," a table of the Homeric parallels around which the novel is constructed, but so did Stuart Gilbert, whose later, book-length study of "Ulysses" Hyman accused Wilson of stealing from. Though it's not part of Hyman's argument, the essay on James, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," is an example of Wilson's habit of acknowledgment. The essay is still often cited for the argument that "The Turn of the Screw" is really a story about the sexual neuroses of the governess, who hallucinates ghosts that no other character can see. In fact, that interpretation had already been proposed by a critic named Edna Kenton, in an essay she published many years earlier in a journal called *The Arts*. No one remembers Kenton, but Wilson had written to her when her article appeared, and he credited her by name in the first paragraph of his essay. And "The Ambiguity of Henry James" is about much more than "The Turn of the Screw."

Wilson respected scholars and took scholarship seriously. He did not respect academic literary criticism, and the emergence of the university English department as a home for critics was possibly one of the reasons for the turn in his career around 1945. He found academic close reading, the sometimes fetishistic attention to form and language, insipid. Most academics, for their part, had little use for him. In 1943, Wilson was asked to write an essay on the influence of Symbolist poetry for *The Kenyon Review*, an organ of the New Criticism. His reaction to the invitation sums up the nature of the antagonism. "It is difficult for me to think of anything I should be less likely to write than an essay on the influence of Symbolist poetry," he complained in a letter to Allen Tate, a friend who was also a close associate of the editor of *The Kenyon Review*, John Crowe Ransom. "I will go even further and say that it seems to me absurd in the extreme for *The Kenyon Review* at this time of day to devote a special number to the subject. And I will even go on to explain that I would not write anything whatever at the request of *The Kenyon Review*. The dullness and sterility and pretentiousness of *The Kenyon*, under the editorship of Ransom, has really been a literary crime." Then the buried lead: "Mary and I have both sent Ransom some of the best things we have written of recent years, and he has declined to print any of them. . . . Of Mary's book he published a stupid and impudent review apparently composed by the office boy; my books he has not reviewed at all."

Wilson did not engage well with literature at the level of the text. He was also not at ease or reliable at the meta-level. He had a journalist's suspicion of abstractions, and he did not think theoretically. When he tried for the broad view—when he undertook to explain the demise of verse as a literary technique, or to describe the alternation of periods of realism with periods of romanticism in modern literature, or to interpret art as compensation for a psychic "wound"—his criticism got reductive very quickly. But he was unsurpassed at the level of the writer and the work. When he gives his tour through "Das Kapital" or "Finnegans Wake" (a book he was excited by) or "Doctor Zhivago" (which he also admired extravagantly), it is as though the book's interior had suddenly been lit up by a thousand-watt bulb. Even readers who thought they already knew the book can see things that they missed, and they realize how partial and muddled their sense of it really was. And the hyper-clarity of the description is complemented by a complete grasp of the corpus, each of the writer's strengths and flaws laid out with juridical precision, no matter how large or problematic the body of work. The result is something better than microscopic analysis; anyone can look through a microscope. The result is a satellite picture. This is why Wilson continued to be read long after many of the critics Hyman believed to be on the path of science were out of print: Constance Rourke, Maud Bodkin, Christopher Caudwell, Caroline Spurgeon, I. A. Richards. Brendan Gill, who was a friend of Wilson's at the time "The Armed Vision" came out, remembered Wilson making only one comment about it, while he was washing his hands in the men's room at the offices of *The New Yorker*. "That Hyman is bad news," he said. When a paperback edition of "The Armed Vision" was published, in 1955, the chapter on Wilson was omitted.

Wilson took literature as it is—that

is, he took what the writer was saying to be what the writer was saying, and not something that required extra-literary equipment to decipher. Hyman was perfectly correct in reading Wilson as the anti-type of the advanced sort of critic he respected. Wilson thought that literature is determined by history and by psychology: that was always, to use the journalistic term, the hook in his pieces. But he did not think, or he did not give attention to the idea, that literature is overdetermined, that a text is shaped by forces in the language and the culture that can multiply and ambiguate its meanings, and that can make it a party to the very conditions that its author is attempting to criticize or transcend. From the point of view of contemporary criticism, this was a limitation. Wilson maintained this faith in the literary, though, because he meant his criticism to have, itself, the force of literature. He did not distinguish the duty to explain from the desire to persuade.

When Edmund Wilson "missed his target," he could do so "by many miles," Berlin once said. He was probably thinking of the portrait of Lenin in "To the Finland Station": the intellectual as heroic man of action. Wilson subsequently reversed his opinion of Lenin, and then compared Lincoln and Lenin, as types of the modern dictator, in the introduction to "Patriotic Gore." And though it is subtitled "Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War," "Patriotic Gore" has little to say about the poetry of Whitman and Melville, and nothing to say about many other important figures, including Frederick Douglass. The comparison of Lincoln with Lenin (and with Bismarck) echoes, of course, the view of Lincoln's assassin: *Sic semper tyrannis.* And "Patriotic Gore" fits neatly next to Wilson's other books of the period—on Zuñi and Haitian culture, and on the Iroquois. It considers the South to be one more little fish swallowed up by the capitalist leviathan. One of the book's longest and most sympathetic chapters is on Alexander Stephens, the Vice-President of the Confederacy. "There is in most of us," Wilson says, "an unreconstructed Southerner who will not accept domination as well as a benevolent despot who wants to mold others for their own good." That was apparently his idea of what the Civil War was about.

Though he did study Haitian writing, Wilson showed no interest in African-American writers, apart from some complimentary remarks about Baldwin. Despite his work on Joyce and Stein, he was never a follower of the avant-garde, in literature or in any of the arts. The writers he followed were serious but mainstream, something that is apparent from the collections he made of his book reviews—"Classics and Commercials" (1950), "The Shores of Light" (1952), and "The Bit Between My Teeth" (1965). The figures he wrote about most frequently were Shaw, Saintsbury, Max Beerbohm, Van Wyck Brooks, Thornton Wilder, Elinor Wylie, Evelyn Waugh, André Malraux. His neglect of American literature after 1950, when he had twenty-two years as a reviewer left, is almost fantastic. His neglect of criticism is only a little less so. He reviewed nothing by Cleanth Brooks, Richard Blackmur, William Wimsatt, William Empson, Northrop Frye, Leslie Fiedler, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, or Lionel Trilling, except for Trilling's first book, on Matthew Arnold. These were critics who shared many of Wilson's interests, but he either regarded them as academic and sterile or considered them unworthy of occupying a portion of the turf he commanded. He told Kazin that he had found nothing of interest in "On Native Grounds." (This did not prevent their becoming friends.)

His judgments could be as idiosyncratic as anyone's, and he tended, when negative, toward the absolute. People who were delighted by his blanket denunciation of detective fiction ("As a department of imaginative writing, it looks to me completely dead") may also have been cheered by his dismissal of "The Lord of the Rings" ("long-winded volumes of what looks to this reader like balderdash"), but they were probably not the people who took satisfaction from his "dissenting opinion" on Kafka ("He is quite true to his time and place, but it is surely a time and place in which few of us will want to linger"). Although he spotted and supported Nabokov's talent early, he found "Lolita" distasteful—"Nasty subjects may make fine books; but I don't feel you have got away with this," he wrote to Nabokov, who was in despair about finding a publisher—and "Pale Fire" made him irritable. The dismissal of "Lolita" was only the beginning of the end of that friendship. Nabokov thought that Wilson's enthusiasm for "Doctor Zhivago," which appeared in English translation in 1958, showed a lack of critical refinement; and in 1965 Wilson published a review of Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin" in which he recklessly challenged Nabokov's knowledge of Russian. Nabokov replied in print, and the absurd public feud went on for several years. Two tyrants under a single roof.

Why shouldn't there be errors and omissions? Wilson was opinionated and arbitrary about the subjects he covered because he was a writer, not an expert. He was not obliged, as professors are, to pick out a single furrow and plow it for life. His whole career was devoted to the opposite principle: that an educated, intelligent person can take on any subject that seems interesting and important, and, by doing the homework and taking care with the exposition, make it interesting and important to other people. There is no point in comparing Wilson—either unfavorably, as Hyman did, or favorably, as people contemptuous of English professors sometimes do today—with academic critics. He operated in an entirely different environment. "To write what you are interested in writing and to succeed in getting editors to pay for it, is a feat that may require pretty close calculation and a good deal of ingenuity," he once explained. "You have to learn to load solid matter into notices of ephemeral happenings; you have to develop a resourcefulness at pursuing a line of thought through pieces on miscellaneous and more or less fortuitous subjects; and you have to acquire a technique of slipping over on the routine of editors the deeper independent work which their over-anxious intentness on the fashions of the month or the week have conditioned them automatically to reject." He wrote in a world where print was still king, and literature was at the center of a nation's culture—circumstances that gave glamour to literary journalism. He sensed that that world was coming to an end before most people did, and he declined to compromise with the future. In the last week of his life, he was taken to see two movies, "The Godfather" and "The French Connection." As always, he recorded his observations in his journal. "Bang bang" was all he wrote. ♦

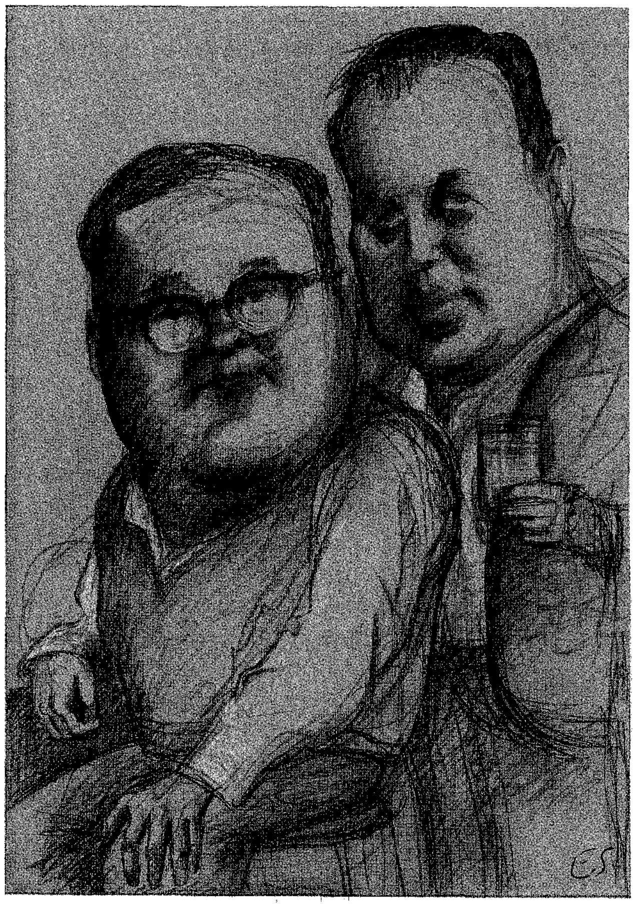
BOOKS

PRIMAL EAR

Roethke, Wright, and the cult of authenticity.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

On August 22, 1957, Pete Rademacher fought Floyd Patterson in Seattle for the world heavyweight championship. In the stands that day were two boxing fans from the English Department of the University of Washington: Theodore Roethke, a forty-nine-year-old professor, and his twenty-nine-year-old student James Wright, who was celebrating the completion of his Ph.D. Each was one of the leading poets of his generation. The year before, Wright's first book of poems, "The Green Wall," had been chosen by W. H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets award; Roethke's most recent book, "The Waking," had won the 1954 Pulitzer Prize.



For Wright and Roethke, poetry was a communion of souls.

EDWARD SOREL

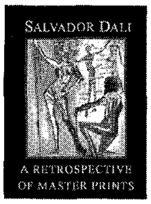
Neither Roethke, the son of a greenhouse owner from Saginaw, Michigan, nor Wright, the son of a factory worker from Martins Ferry, Ohio, regarded a prizefight as an incongruous setting for poets. On the contrary, they imported the vocabulary of boxing—its swagger and its feuds—into their discussions of the poetry world. "Allen Tate," Wright assured Roethke, "certainly seems to think you're the Heavyweight Champion of contemporary American poetry." This must have delighted the older poet, who approached his rivals in a fighting crouch: "Those limp-pricks," he bragged, "I can write rings around any of them." And, in a letter to James Dickey, Wright insisted that without "the high joy which is all that matters . . . poetry is considerably less interesting than boxing."

For all these masculine growls, though, there have been few American poets more acutely tenderhearted, more genuinely and at times dismayingly sensitive, than Roethke and Wright. Roethke's great subject was the secret life of flowers, plants, and children, while Wright allied himself in his poetry with the dispossessed and the outcast. Both poets were deeply sentimental about women, especially after each found happiness in a late marriage. And they were still more vulnerable on the subject of fathers—the taciturn, unemotional men about whom Roethke and Wright wrote some of their best poems.

No wonder that, in their letters, they stepped so gingerly around the paternal element in their relationship. "I've spent nearly the whole of three sessions with my doctor yacking about you," Roethke wrote Wright in 1958. "Apparently you're more of an emotional symbol to me than I realized: a combination of student-younger brother—something like that. (I even shed a tear or two.)" Wright was equally careful to avoid the language of fathers and sons: "I've never directly told you what I think of you, because I'm afraid you would think I am turning you into a father. I swear I never have thought of you as a father." Instead, Wright relaxed into a more comfortable metaphor: "I myself feel funny about writing it down on paper. It's as though I were reminding myself that I am breathing, or that I am happy, or that I just won a fist-fight."

Decades have now passed since their sadly premature deaths—Roethke's in 1963, Wright's in 1980—and today they need to be reintroduced to a generation of readers who are likely to know them only from a few anthology pieces. It is a nice coincidence, then, that new editions of both poets' work have recently appeared: "Theodore Roethke: Selected Poems" (Library of America; $20), edited by Edward Hirsch, and "James Wright: Selected Poems" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $13), edited by Robert Bly and Anne Wright. A large volume of Wright's selected letters, "A Wild Perfection" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $40), has also just been published. Reading the two poets side by side helps their distinctive gifts to stand out sharply—along with their equally suggestive limitations. For Roethke and Wright both hoped that poetry could be a communion of souls, beyond or below the level of literature. But over the course of their careers they paid a high aesthetic price for their belief that earnestness could make a poem live.

The sense that, by the nineteen-forties, modern poetry had become too difficult—too remote from ordinary language and subjects, too hard to understand—was practically the only thing that united American poets of the mid-twentieth century: academic and populist, the students of John Crowe Ransom and the companions of Allen Ginsberg. The thirst of these poets—those born, roughly, between 1905 and 1930—for an alternative to the strenuous complexities



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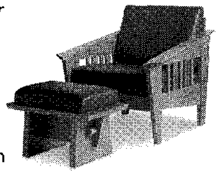

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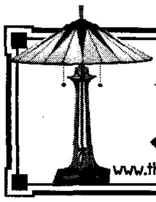

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of high modernism, as defined by the example and precept of Eliot and Pound, led to an explosion of new styles in mid-century American poetry: the Beats, the confessionalism of Robert Lowell and John Berryman, the projective verse of Charles Olson, and the "deep image" poetry with which Wright would be associated.

Yet Roethke and Wright were unusual in their early and intense mistrust not just of modernism but of the whole idea of poetic sophistication. Each was the product of a decidedly unliterary Midwestern setting—before Wright, the last writer to emerge from Martins Ferry, Ohio, had been William Dean Howells—and retained a lifelong suspicion of cleverness. To justify their calling, they had to insist that poetry had more to do with authenticity than with artistry.

As early as 1926, when Roethke was a sophomore at the University of Michigan, he was already laying special claim to "sincerity,—that prime virtue of any creative worker." "I write only what I believe to be the absolute truth," he maintained in an essay for a writing class, "even if I must ruin the theme in so doing. In this respect I feel far superior to those glib people in my classes who often garner better grades than I do. They are so often pitiful frauds,—artificial—insincere.... Many an incoherent yet sincere piece of writing has outlived the polished product."

For a few fortunate years, in the second half of the forties, Roethke did succeed in making magic out of inarticulateness. His best and most characteristic poems concoct a new language for the shapeless urges of the unconscious. "One belief: 'One must go back to go forward,' " he wrote to the critic Kenneth Burke in 1946. "And by back I mean down into the consciousness of the race itself not just the quandaries of adolescence, damn it." In "Open House," his 1941 début volume, Roethke's verse was still constrained by the formal neatness of his youthful influences—especially Louise Bogan, the poet and longtime poetry critic for *The New Yorker*, who was briefly Roethke's lover. Even in his early poems, however, he was drawn to images that could not help seeming Freudian and Jungian: massive subterranean forces, painful hidden blockages. "The teeth of knitted gears / Turn slowly through the night, / But the true substance bears / The hammer's weight," he wrote in "The Adamant."

Roethke had wandered into his true subject before he discovered a style that could accommodate it. The creation of that style was an arduous triumph, requiring him to return to the primal scenes of his own childhood. His biographer, Allan Seager, records that Roethke, while working on the poems of his best book—"The Lost Son and Other Poems," published in 1948—sometimes went around the house naked, a token of a larger stripping down.

The first fruit of this effort was the famous "greenhouse poems," in which Roethke re-creates the vegetable world of his earliest years. Roethke's family operated one of the largest nurseries in Michigan, thus allowing him to fill his poems with immediately legible symbols of psychic growth—roots, stems, and blossoms. But it took Roethke's talent for powerfully indirect evocation to make the greenhouse not just a metaphor but an eerily living presence, as in "Root Cellar":

> And what a congress of stinks!—
> Roots ripe as old bait,
> Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
> Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against
> slippery planks.
> Nothing would give up life:
> Even the dirt kept breathing a small
> breath.

Nearly a century and a half after Wordsworth, Roethke manages to invent an entirely new kind of nature poetry, in which the earth is not reassuringly earthy but teeming and alien. At times, Roethke's greenhouse even becomes surreally menacing: "So many devouring infants! / Soft luminescent fingers, / Lips neither dead nor alive, / Loose ghostly mouths / Breathing." Lines like these, from "Orchids," show just how much Sylvia Plath learned from Roethke about making the reader shiver.

In "The Lost Son and Other Poems," Roethke also began another major sequence that he would wrestle with for the next several years—what he described as "a series of longer pieces which try, in their rhythms, to catch the movement of the mind itself, to trace the spiritual history of a protagonist (not 'I' personally but of all haunted and harried men)." If poems like "Weed Puller" had shown the poet pressing himself as close to nature as he could get—"Me down in that fetor of weeds, / Crawling on all fours"—Roethke's new style attempted to vault the barrier of sentience, to speak with nature's own voice.

From "The Lost Son and Other Poems" through his next book, "Praise to the End!" (1951), to "The Waking" (1953), Roethke experimented with this new style. But he never accomplished more with it than he did in "The Lost Son," the first poem in the sequence. Like "The Waste Land," whose influence is profound but seldom obvious, "The Lost Son" dispenses with plot and argument for the sake of a hypnotically effective voice. The poem charts the emotions of a man mourning the death of his father, and it progresses through a chain of moods: grief, nostalgia, regression to childhood terrors, and, finally, a tentative reawakening to adulthood. Appropriately, Roethke draws from the deepest wells of the English language—Mother Goose, Shakespeare, the Bible—in order to create a new idiom for primal experience:

> All the leaves stuck out their tongues;
> I shook the softening chalk of my bones,
> Saying,
> Snail, snail, glister me forward,
> Bird, soft-sigh me home,
> Worm, be with me.
> This is my hard time.

"The Lost Son" is the peak of Roethke's inventiveness as a poet. But his attempt to extend its discoveries into a whole sequence revealed the fragility of this technique: without the momentum of narrative, it quickly grows static and repetitive. There are wonderful passages in "Praise to the End!" that manage to capture childish orality and sexuality with a disturbing vividness. Yet by the time he wrote "O, Thou Opening, O," from "The Waking," even Roethke seems to have grown impatient with his style: "And now are we to have that pelludious Jesus-shimmer over all things, the animal's candid gaze, a shade less than feathers . . . I'm tired of all that, Bag-Foot."

When Roethke tried to return to a more explicit and formal kind of poetry, the limits of his sensibility were harshly exposed. ("Ted had hardly any general *ideas* at all," Auden reportedly said.) And his late poems, from "The Waking" through the posthumous "The Far Field" (1964), are crowded with limp, quasi-mystical abstractions: "I learned not to fear infinity, / The far field, the windy cliffs of forever, / The dying of time in the white light of tomorrow." What is most disappointing in Roethke's late work is the way he fell back into emulation of the established modernist idols, especially Yeats and the Eliot of "Four Quartets." Imitation as direct as Roethke's of Yeats, in "The Dance," is usually found only in very young poets, not in accomplished masters. It was as though, having used up his poetic capital—his childhood—Roethke looked to those authoritative voices for reassurance.

The failures of his late work confirm that Roethke's real subject was his own inwardness; he wrote best when he avoided direct statement in favor of tremulous connotation. That is why Roethke was always at a loss when asked what his poems meant. They could not be elucidated, he knew, only intuited. "Believe me," he adjured the reader in a 1950 "Open Letter," "you will have no trouble if you approach these poems as a child would, naïvely, with your whole being awake, your faculties loose and alert."

Long before he met Roethke, James Wright shared his view of sincerity as the central literary value. In 1946, the eighteen-year-old Wright sent some of his poems to a professor who had offered encouragement. "As you read them," Wright warned, "you will be conscious of the absence of a syllable here and there, and even of the discarding of iambics altogether. I would rather sacrifice technical skill than sincerity." Throughout his career, Wright, still more than Roethke, would gamble on the obvious intensity of his emotions—his loneliness, compassion, wonder—to accomplish more than mere "technical skill" ever could.

Wright's revulsion against the sterility of technique was all the more extreme because of his early proficiency as a writer of traditional verse. His first book was characterized not by audacity but by a highly polished literary language: "For who could bear such beauty under the sky? / I would have held her loveliness in air." Yet Wright had emerged from a still less literary milieu than Roethke. "My mother had to leave school when she was in the sixth grade, my father had to leave when he was in the eighth grade," Wright recalled near the end of his life. "He went into the factory when he was fourteen and my mother went to work in a laundry."

Wright would often honor his father's

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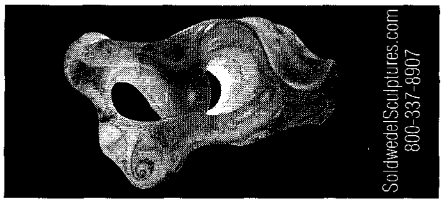

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lifetime of manual labor in his verse: "one slave / To Hazel-Atlas Glass became my father," he wrote in "At the Executed Murderer's Grave," one of his best early poems. But already in that poem, from his second collection, "Saint Judas" (1959), Wright was moving away from pastoral elegance, straining to incorporate the brutal realities of working-class Ohio:

> I waste no pity on the dead that stink,
> And no love's lost between me and the
>   crying
> Drunks of Belaire, Ohio, where police
> Kick at their kidneys till they die of drink.

The stylistic revolution that was to produce Wright's best poetry was touched off by a passing insult in a 1958 review, by James Dickey, of the anthology "New Poets of England and America," where Wright took his place alongside many of the young writers who were to dominate American poetry for the next several decades—including Richard Wilbur, Adrienne Rich, and Anthony Hecht. But Dickey found the anthology "representative of a generation that has as yet exhibited very little passion, urgency, or imagination," and he went on to dismiss Wright's work in just two words—"ploddingly sincere."

After Dickey's essay appeared, in the *Sewanee Review*, Wright wrote him a crude and defensive letter: "Since you both think and feel that my verses stink, it is your responsibility as well as your privilege to say so in print." Yet he viewed Dickey's critical approach as needlessly cruel. Students sometimes asked Wright for his opinion of their verse, he went on, and "when their verses were sentimental and inept, I believe that I have criticized them honestly and severely; however, I have never greeted a student by telling her to go fuck herself and shove her hideous poems up her ass."

When Dickey replied sternly to this attack, though, Wright collapsed into contrition and self-reproach. "As I sit here," he admitted, "I think I know why I was hurt. You simply said that I was not a poet. This remark of yours only confirmed what—obviously enough—is a central fear of mine, and which I have been deeply struggling to face for some time." Wright's doubts about his highly praised work were compounded by another jolt that he received in the very same week, when he read the first issue of Robert Bly's new little magazine, *The Fifties,* whose inside front cover declared, "The editors of this magazine think that most of the poetry published in America today is too old-fashioned." Just two days after his mea culpa to Dickey, Wright wrote to Bly, entirely renouncing his early work: "My book was dead. It could have been written by a dead man, if they have Corona typewriters in the grave."

This double shock succeeded in winning Wright over to what Bly called, in an essay in the second issue of *The Fifties,* "the new poetry." According to Bly, the "old style, with the iamb, its caesuras, its rhymes, its thousands of rhythms reminding us of other poems and other countries . . . is like a man speaking who gestures too much. . . . But in the new poetry, the contrary is true—there is no necessity in the form itself for continual gesture, by rhyme, etc.—therefore, if you raise your little finger once, slowly, it has tremendous meaning."

This metaphor perfectly describes the technique of the first volume that Wright produced after this crisis: "The Branch Will Not Break," published in 1963. The book contains much of Wright's best writing, which indeed wagers everything on the effectiveness of small, dramatic gestures. The most celebrated and controversial example is "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota."

The poem is a catalogue of meticulously observed natural details—"the bronze butterfly, / Asleep on the black trunk," "The droppings of last year's horses"—which concludes with a sudden, seemingly unjustified swerve: "A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home. / I have wasted my life." The last line suggests how "deep image" poetry differs from the Imagism of the nineteen-tens: it is not the visual composition that matters to Wright but the way the visible world calls forth a mysterious inward response. And for Wright—as for Roethke, who declared that his poetry's leaps of association "either . . . are imaginatively right or they're not"—the link between things seen and things felt cannot be artificially prepared. He agreed with Bly's dictum that "in the new style, where the tension and density of the emotion is everything, you have to, like a good gambler, agree to stake everything on one throw."

Still more than Roethke, Wright is tempted to turn his poems' aesthetic gamble into a moral test. As he wrote to his close friend Donald Hall, "Whatever a poet has been in the past, right now he is defined, to me, as a man who has both the power and the courage to see, and then, to show, the truth through words. If I'm a bad poet, that means a liar." The literary results of this high-mindedness, however, were decidedly mixed. In his work of the nineteen-sixties, Wright's determination "to show the truth" can give his voice a grave credibility, as in "Speak": "To speak in a flat voice / Is all that I can do. / . . . I speak of flat defeat / In a flat voice." But often in his later writing Wright strips from his poetry the very things that turn a personal experience into a shared work of art. In his quest to make his poetry authentic, he often descends to melodramatic reporting on his own emotions: "I feel lonesome, / And sick at heart, / Frightened, / And I don't know / Why." And he wards off any doubts about this style—his own or his readers'—with a kind of truculent earnestness:

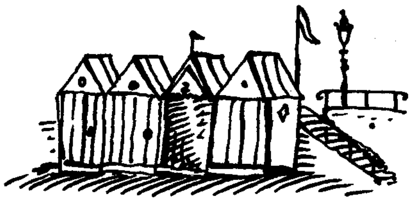
> This is not a poem.
> This is not an apology to the Muse.
> This is the cold-blooded plea of a
>   homesick vampire
> To his brother and friend.
> If you do not care one way or another
>   about
> The preceding lines,
> Please do not go on listening
> On any account of mine.
> Please leave the poem.
> Thank you.

But the job of the poet is to make the reader want to care—to awaken his sympathy, not extort it. The problem with Wright's and Roethke's poetics of sincerity is that it allows the poet to believe that right thinking is more important than good writing. In a 1961 essay, Wright made this denigration of artistry explicit: "It should be unnecessary to say that gentleness and courage in dealing with a subject matter very close to life . . . are primarily matters of personal character; and that, where the character is lacking, no amount of literary skill can substitute for it." It is equally unnecessary to say that the reverse is also true: gentleness and courage, unfortunately perhaps, are unavailing without the colder cunning of the artist. Only when they combined both kinds of virtue did Roethke and Wright produce the poems by which they continue to live. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

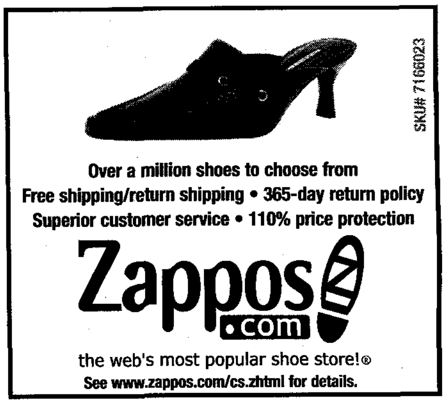
Until I Find You, *by John Irving (Random House; $27.95).* Irving's vast novel recounts the life of an actor as he tries to find the father who abandoned him and to come to terms with the traumas of his youth: a mother who was an itinerant tattoo artist and occasional prostitute, schooling at an all-girls academy where he was tormented by older classmates, sexual molestation at the hands of a woman who had been a kind of nanny. The story gets off to an energetic start as he and his mother scamper through Scandanavian seaports looking for the father, but it quickly becomes bogged down by unnecessary detail. When we finally meet the father, now ailing, we get a clearer impression of his illness and his doctors than of the man himself. This curious absence is all the more disappointing as Irving has said that the novel is based on his own youth, but it's unfortunately typical of a book in which the main characters seem two-dimensional.

Freddy and Fredericka, *by Mark Helprin (Penguin Press; $27.95).* A thinly veiled satire of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, pre-divorce—his serious mien and protruding ears, her horsey sex appeal—turns into a comic adventure when the eponymous royal couple are sent on a secret mission to conquer the United States, where they plunge in and out of such ludicrous scrapes as knocking out each other's front teeth and surviving a raging wildfire. The narrative often feels burdened by its subplots, including a nefarious attempt by press barons to dethrone the royal couple, and Helprin has a distracting tendency to throw in gossipy asides about real personages, such as Bill Gates. But the sentimental pieties familiar from Helprin's previous work—his strapping, athletic hero and heroine rhapsodize about the values of hard work and finding oneself—are here made more palatable by the absurd context. Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" perhaps wields too overt an influence, but at its best the novel achieves genuine lightness.



Divided by God, *by Noah Feldman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* Having examined Islam and democracy in his first book, "After Jihad," Feldman, a law professor at N.Y.U., turns his attention to America's own fraught religious-secular divide. Much of the book consists of an agile account of the evolution of church-state relations, from the creation of the First Amendment to the 2003 Supreme Court ruling against a public display of the Ten Commandments. Feldman identifies two polarized camps today: "values evangelicals," who uphold religious values as integral to political decisions, and "legal secularists," whose aim is to keep religion and government separate. He downplays the heterogeneity within these groups, perhaps in order to bolster his solution for reconciliation: sanctioning "public manifestations of religion," while withholding government funding from religious institutions.

A Field Guide to Getting Lost, *by Rebecca Solnit (Viking; $21.95).* This meditation on the pleasures and terrors of getting lost is—as befits its subject—less a coherent argument than a series of peregrinations, leading the reader to unexpected vistas. The word "lost," Solnit informs us, derives from the Old Norse for disbanding an army, and she extrapolates from this the idea of striking "a truce with the wide world." It's the wideness of the world that entices: a map of this deceptively slender volume would include hermit crabs, who live in scavenged shells; marauding conquistadors; an immigrant grandmother committed to an asylum; white frontier children kidnapped by Indians; and Hitchcock's "Vertigo." Solnit imagines a long-distance runner accumulating moments when neither foot is on the ground, "tiny fragments of levitation," and argues, by analogy, that in relinquishing certainty we approach, if only fleetingly, the divine.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DANCING

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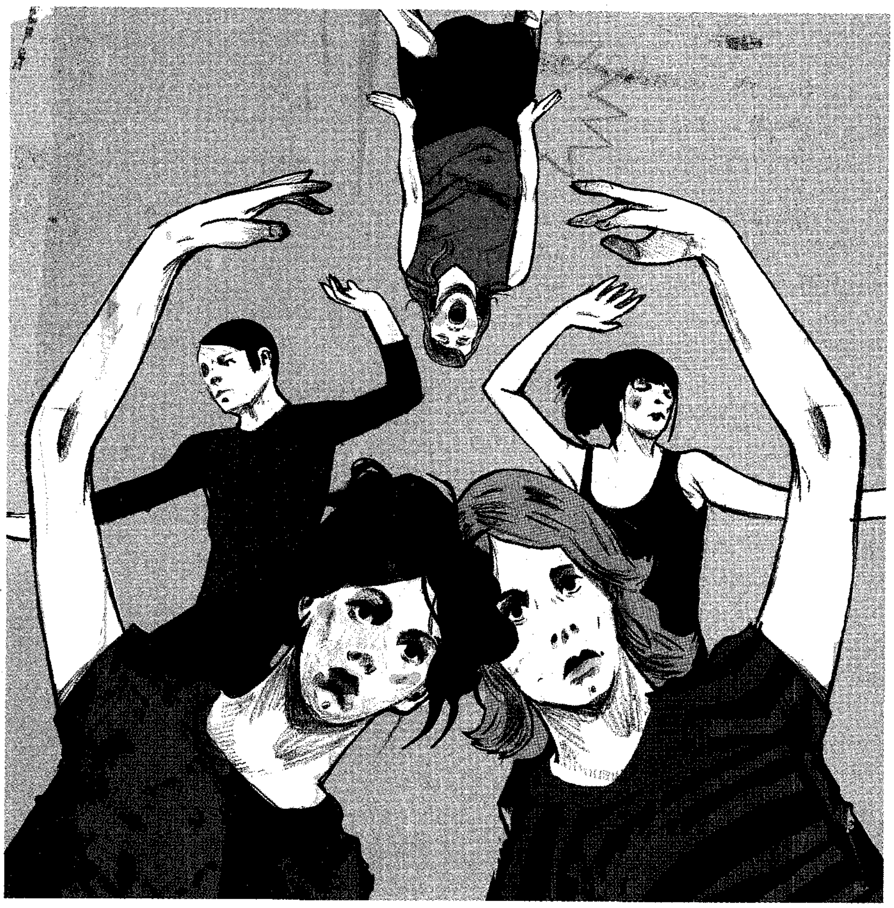
Downtown surrealists.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Right now, New York's "downtown" dance shows no engulfing trends, as it did in the nineteen-sixties and seventies (conceptualism and politics), or in the eighties and nineties (irony and politics). Nevertheless, there is a busy little nest of choreographers who might be called surrealists. Actually, we've had surrealists for a while. Pilobolus, founded in the seventies, falls under that heading, as does Martha Clarke, who started out with Pilobolus. Pina Bausch abetted the tendency when her company started touring here in the eighties. But these companies' shows, however committed to the heart's madness, were still quite accessible. You could tell what the dancers were doing. You could say, "Now he's taking a bath, now she's waving a gun." As a result, such works were very popular. Today's downtown surrealists tend to be more ambiguous. Therefore, they are still downtown. As yet, none of them have performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the major channel by which downtown work meets uptown ticket buyers.



In Tere O'Connor's "Frozen Mommy," the dancers seem mad and, at times, evil.

The elder statesman of the group is Tere O'Connor, whose company is twenty years old. Imagine that you locked a bunch of children in an attic with some K rations and then came back three years later. What you might find is something like a dance by O'Connor. In his "Frozen Mommy," which had its première at the Kitchen last winter and was reprised at Dance Theatre Workshop in July, the five dancers engage in intense and highly specific actions—they hold their fingers just so, their heads just so—but you have no idea why they're doing these things. (Nor do you get any help from the sound score, by O'Connor with James F. Baker; it is a cacophony punctuated by long silences.) The dancers seem mad and, at many points, evil. At the same time, there is a strong note of playacting, which the participants miss no opportunity to point out in their fellows. When one dancer rolls his head, presumably in agony, another says, "Head rolls! What's a fucking head roll? Tragedy of man!" Still, the tragedy of man is eloquently represented. One woman kneads her belly as if she were rolling up a sleeping bag—a frightening sight. Twice, a man screams, "Mommy!," though he clips the two syllables a little too elegantly. Emotion is thus taken seriously, and also undercut, with great psychological accuracy. At the end, the dancers stand stock still, with their hands on their hips, for about three unbearable minutes. "Enough of these histrionics!" they seem to say. Then one of them falls to the floor, sobbing, and the lights go out. Is your heart broken? No, but it is shaken. You saw Mommy, and she was frozen.

One of the dancers in O'Connor's troupe, a beady-eyed man named Christopher Williams, is a choreographer himself (also a puppeteer), and he loves medieval stories and art—an emotion consummated in his dance piece "Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins," which played at P.S. 122 in May. The show has eleven sections, each a study of a female martyr: St. Ursula, St. Lucy, St. Agnes, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and some lesser-knowns. Modern historians of the Church tend to sniff at the gory and fantastical tales of these famous maidens. (According to the killjoy "Penguin Dictionary of Saints," the eleven thousand virgins said to have accompanied St. Ursula in her flight from an unwanted marriage may actually have been eleven.) But Williams adores these stories, and treats them with tender artistry.

The great power of "Ursula" lies in its concentration, its economy. About St. Agnes there is a long, elaborate legend, but Williams focusses Agnes's routine on one idea, the lamb, which is her symbol and the meaning of her name. After her dance, she is approached by a

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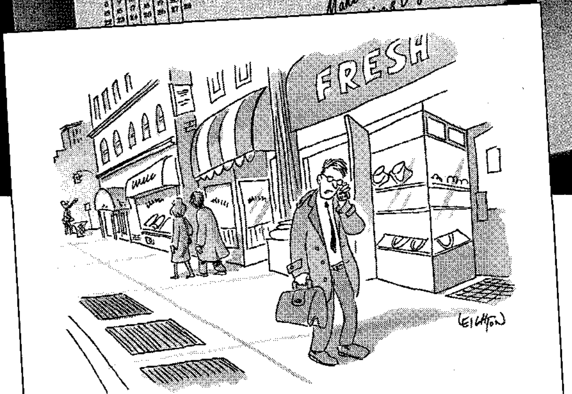

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"Can you hang on a sec? I think I just took another picture of my ear."

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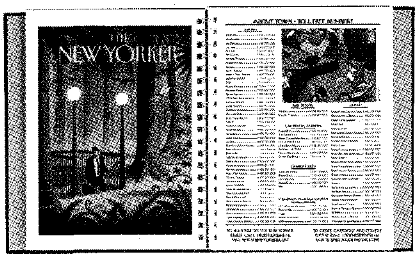

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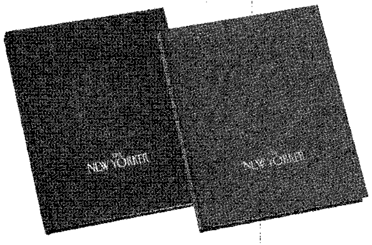

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cute little lamb, a marionette. The lamb's belly is laced up with a red ribbon—a pretty sight, at first. Then Agnes unlaces the ribbon, leaving the lamb's gut hanging open. Worse, she swallows this blood-red ribbon. The lamb, of course, is the symbol not just of Agnes but of Christ, so here we have Christ's death (and the Eucharist) as well as Agnes's, for she was killed by a knife through the throat. Even if you didn't know any of that, the scene was still a perfect sample of surrealism: horror, beauty, and drollery all in one.

Some of Williams's dances looked too much alike, but considering that all his heroines met similar ends, the wonder is how much difference—and ingenuity—he achieved. St. Lucy with her arms and legs splayed in the air, as if she were being crucified; St. Christina on her back, with her hands and feet glued together, struggling offstage like a moving blob—these are dance images, and whatever literal meaning they convey is secondary to the poetic force of the movement. Williams adapted his dances to his performers, and they ranged from virtuoso professionals (Vicky Shick, Wendy Perron, Derry Swan) to Elizabeth Zimmer, the dance editor of the *Village Voice*, doing a fine, stolid turn as St. Wilgefortis, who, to get rid of her fiancé, grew a big red beard. The costumes that Williams created with Michael Oberle belong in a museum. St. Catherine's gown looked as if it had been sewn from parchment. St. Margaret came out with an exquisitely dressed green dragon hanging from her neck. (Inside the dragon suit was Williams.) A further layer of richness was the music, which included everything from medieval hymns to modern electronics, and was played live, by a five-piece ensemble, on a viola da gamba, a conch shell, and other instruments. Never before, I would guess, has so much art been expended on a piece for P.S. 122's New, New Stuff series, which, as its name suggests, specializes in the semi-pro. P.S. 122 should be congratulated for producing this show, but "Ursula" deserves to be shown in a larger theatre, or just a theatre with more seats. The four performances were completely sold out, with people on the sidewalk crying for tickets.

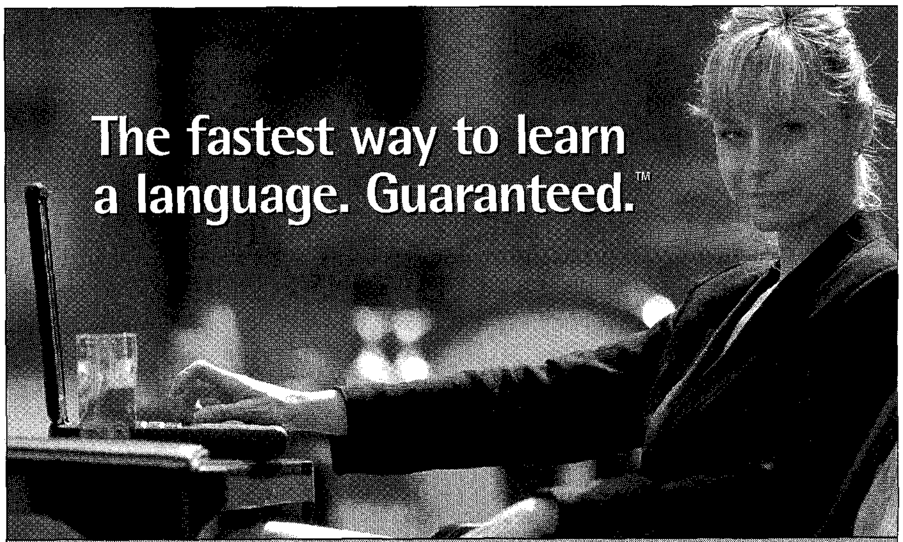
Williams is not the only interesting person to come out of O'Connor's company. Lucy Guerin is another. Guerin is an Australian, based in Melbourne, but she was in New York for a number of years in the nineties, performing, and also developing her own work, a creepy, fascinating sort of movement theatre. I wish she'd move back here, but in June she did make a brief appearance, as the choreographer of a work, "Tense Dave," presented at Dance Theatre Workshop by the Australian troupe Chunky Move, under the direction of Gideon Obarzanek.

"Tense Dave" takes place on a circular platform that rotates throughout the show, destabilizing us from the start. The platform is divided into wedges, like a pie, except that the wedges have walls, creating little rooms. In one room, a mad girl, unimprovably played by Michelle Heaven, sits in a rumpled bed, plotting evil. (She has a knife.) In another, a woman plays an invisible piano, equipped with a visible candelabra. In a third, a man is committing suicide. He has a plastic bag over his head, and this seems to be doing the trick. But no—when his room comes around again, he is trying a garrote. In the fourth cubicle, a man is talking to his feet. "Don't move," he tells them. "Stay right there." To one he says, "You're my favorite." Later, we see him photographing them—a tricky business, because by then he is upside down in his chair, with his trousers at his ankles.

Through these rooms travels our title character, Dave, trying to make sense of it all and having a hard time, as do we. The most bewildering moment, I guess, was when the man with the foot problem, now revealed as a psychoanalyst (I think), suggests to the bedridden girl what she might do with her finger. She might conduct an orchestra, he says, or put on a puppet show, or have sex. Soon afterward, she ducks her head and arms into her nightgown, and for a while all we see of her is just this white nightie, running around on hot little legs. The whole thing ends badly, of course. And it doesn't end. At the conclusion, the others have decamped, but poor Dave is still there, and the platform starts to revolve in the opposite direction. Watching this piece was like walking into Max Ernst's "Une Semaine de Bonté."

Then there is Sarah Michelson, an English choreographer based in New York and another colleague of O'Connor's. Michelson is much talked about these days. The *Times* recently ran an article on her life problems—her foot injury, her unpaid rent, her feeling that she's fed up with dance and should probably go into film instead. Michelson doesn't just design dances; she designs the spaces they occur in. For her recent "Daylight," presented in June at P.S. 122, she remodelled the theatre, placing the audience in a kind of box, with the musicians behind them, and leaving a performing space that was only about twelve feet deep. This show was one of the strangest things I have ever seen. The four dancers entered through an upstage passageway that looked like something from Dr. Caligari's house. They then launched into a carefully rehearsed, largely unison dance that was traditional in one sense—it was done on the music—and in no other. Most of the movement was completely opaque: air pattings, shadow-boxing, arm juttings, freezes. Between these maneuvers, the dancers did a sort of prancing step, often in place, or I think that's what they did. Because of the shallow performing space, the dancers were often too far to your right or your left for you to see them properly—a difficulty that I assume was deliberately engineered.

This was interesting at first. Michelson is a riveting performer. Even after you've figured out what her tattoos say ("Looking for the light" on her breastbone, "strong" on her left arm), you can't stop watching her. Also wonderful was Greg Zuccolo, another O'Connor-company alumnus. But finally—maybe after the moment when one dancer said to another, "Roger, have you been swimming? Well, it's fine if you have"—I began to feel a little abused. By definition, surrealist art is irrational, but of all the neo-surrealist work I've described here only Michelson's seemed to deploy its enigmas *against* the audience. At the end, or what seemed to be the end, the dancers exited, the houselights went up, and a good third of the audience was out the door when a brand-new dancer materialized and, on the now dark stage, did a solo unrelated to what had gone before. People in the aisles had to skulk back to their seats. "Fooled you!" Michelson seemed to be saying. Maybe she really is fed up with dance. But she alone, of these four choreographers, is going to BAM, next year. Attitude sells. ♦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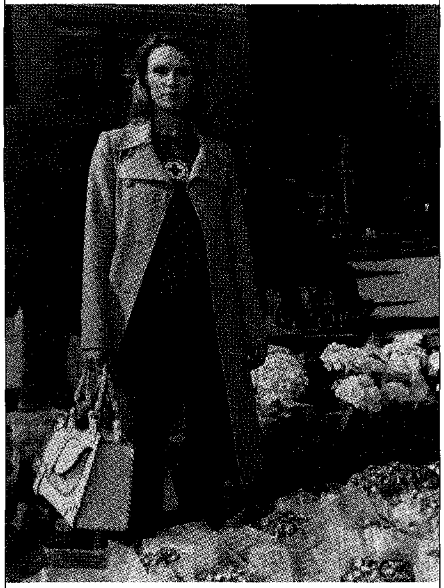

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TELLING STORIES

Winslow Homer at the National Gallery.

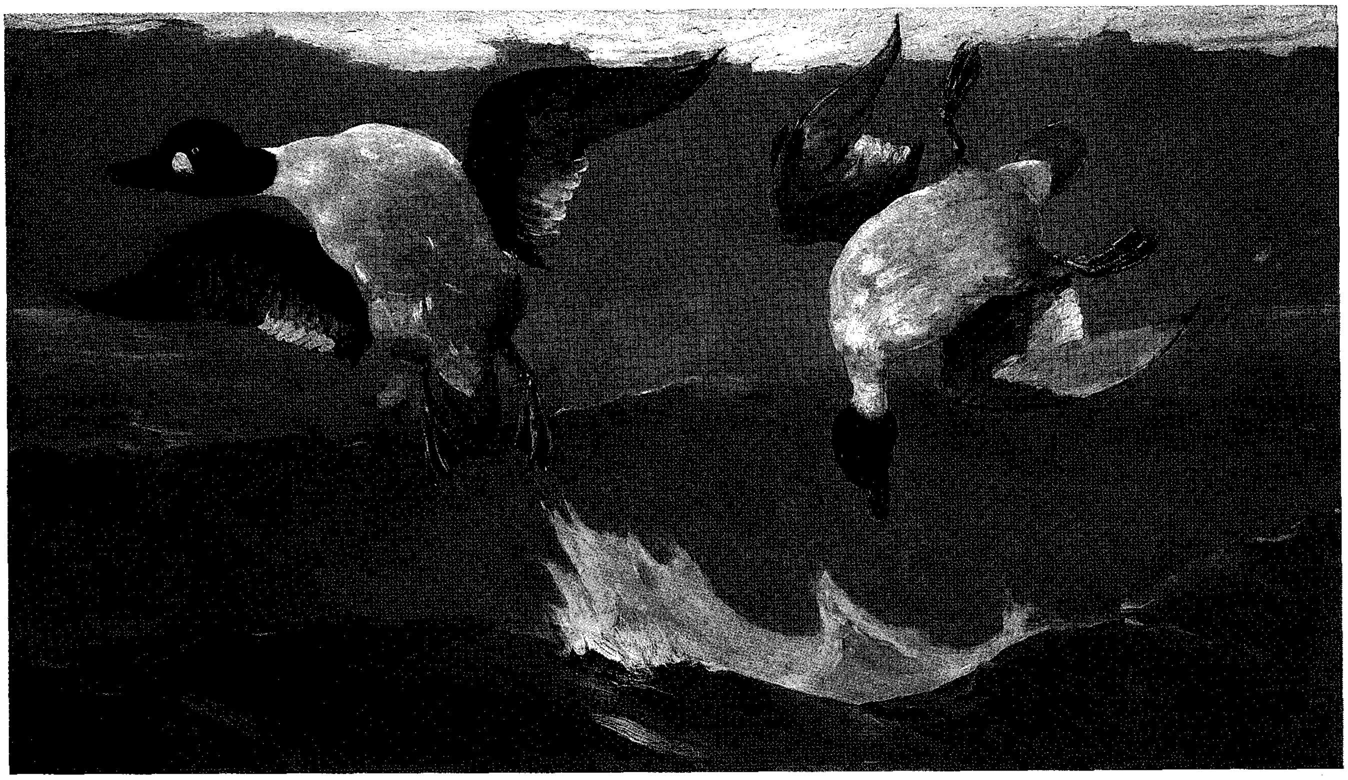
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Winslow Homer's first oil painting, which he made in 1863, when he was a twenty-six-year-old freelancer illustrating Civil War scenes for *Harper's Weekly*, shows a Union sharpshooter in a tree, balancing a rifle for an imminent shot. The man's perch is precarious. His concentration is total. Nature—soft tufts of dusky foliage, scraps of yellowish sky—attends indifferently. Decades later, Homer recalled having peered at a man through the telescopic sight of a sharpshooter's weapon. The impression, he wrote in a letter, "struck me as being as near murder as anything I could think of in connection with the army & I always had a horror of that branch of the service." This compunction, which I encountered in a text accompanying an engraving of the same subject in a current show at the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C., of about fifty Homers from the museum's collection, surprises me not for its content but because I don't think of the extraordinarily stolid Homer as having opinions. (The sole quote from him that sticks in my mind is a bit of advice to seascape painters: "Never put more than two waves in a picture; it's fussy." Somehow, words to live by.) Certainly, nothing like horror inflects "The Sharpshooter on Picket Duty," which mainly conveys professional competence. The soldier, with one booted foot athletically braced in a crook of the tree and the other dangling, and grasping a branch on which his gun rests, is all business. The engraved version differs from the painting in one extra detail—a canteen hanging in the tree, indicating a lengthy stay for the sniper at his post. By excluding the canteen, the beginner painter demonstrated an instinct for the difference between reportage and art, even as he maintained an emotional detachment, basic to reporting, that would distinguish him as a great and, particularly, an American artist—ever the undistracted sharpshooter.

Homer keeps getting better, as I've had repeated occasions to notice since responding ambivalently to a major traveling retrospective that opened at the National Gallery in 1995. I was in the right bad mood, at the time, to tax the artist with a spiritual tedium of Victorian-era Yankee culture, which he served doggedly with genre pictures ranging from homesick soldiers to ladies playing croquet to slickered fishermen braving squalls. Partly, I was reacting against publicity for the show which characterized Homer as "America's greatest and most national painter," and not only because it dismissed Jackson Pollock. A Midwesterner myself, I questioned the "national" bona fides of visions of native nature confined to the Atlantic coast and the Adirondacks. And then there was Homer's sexlessness. Undoubtedly heterosexual, he was a washout at romance—no amorous Walt Whitman or even the intriguingly neurotic Thomas Eakins but "a quiet little fellow," in the words of a friend—numb to personal magnetism, female or male, and with a pronounced distaste for bodies except in action. In my judgment of the retrospective, I did make exceptions for Homer's watercolors, whose translucency coaxed fully sensuous expressiveness from him, and for some late paintings of crashing waves that with their exactly measured, explosive force outdo Friedrich, Courbet, and even Turner. But I was perversely clenched against enjoying the key aspect of Homer's talent, which is based in his early discipline as an illustrator: a prehensile feel for the iconic—the identification of a subject with its representation, such that, in memory, one becomes inseparable from the other. My punishment, ever since, has been to undergo shocks of chastened veneration whenever I happen upon his masterpieces.

Homer was born in Boston in 1836, the middle son of a hardware merchant who, in 1849, went bust in the gold rush. At the age of eighteen, Homer was apprenticed at a lithography shop. Thereafter, he freelanced while studying art in schools and on his own. In 1860, acquiring a copy of the French scientist M. E. Chevreul's "Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors" (an analysis of how color interacts in the eye), Homer grounded his practice in modernizing theories that were shared by the French Impressionists—who seem not to have influenced him directly. (Much of his work retains a uniquely up-to-date air.) of it lies in a tonal modulation of strong color: a luminous blue, white-clouded sky silhouettes the boat and its figures, whose shadowed hues smolder. The contrast nails North Atlantic light, which is bright and clear but frail. The effect has a chill in it, and a tang. Anecdotal details of the scene, such as the boys' delighted postures and the gleam of fish in the hold, make specific a timeless experience. There is a sense of something never properly painted before which now needn't be painted again—a dramatic quality that distinguishes Homer from the Impressionists, who neutralized subject matter. Homer's storytelling put him on the losing side of modern art. Alfred Stieglitz denigrated his work, though with an odd note of respect, as "nothing more than the highest type of Illustration." (Henry James found Homer "almost barbarously simple, and, to our eye, he is horribly ugly; but there is nevertheless something one likes about him," proving that you cannot stay mad at this artist.) Homer is improving at present because the banishment of illustration from canonical modern painting, after Manet, has worn out. We like stories, and important painting of the past forty years, from Gerhard Richter to John Currin, has become ever more illustrative, and enamored of the one-off image.

The hunting tales in "Hound and Hunter" and "Right and Left" must be taken on faith, because one is so strange and the other is impossible. In the first, a young man in a canoe on a darkling forest lake clings to an antler of a submerged, dead deer while looking at his swimming dog. (In a technique called "hounding," dogs chased game into water to be shot, clubbed, or drowned.) In the second—one of Homer's last works—two foreground ducks taking off from turbulent waters are hit by a distant hunter's double-barrelled buckshot; one has flipped upside down, and the other is transfixed with neck straining and wings spread, startled by death. The birds are black-and-white, the water several shades of gray with a splash of light blue. A tiny lick of red-orange locates the hunter's gun, and a duck's staring eye has a yellow iris. A ragged cream-colored band along the top of the painting suggests dawn. The picture's muted color harmonies are worthy of Whistler, and the boldly and tenderly worked paint surface evokes Manet. A career that began with a dispassionate shooter draws to an end with unresentful shot ducks. Homer's America, always energetic, is never so calm as when it is violent, in extreme instances of the one moral quality that overmastered, for him, all others: unsimple truth. ♦



"Right and Left" (1909). Homer's America, always energetic, is never so calm as when it is violent.

Living on Washington Square, he had many friends and supporters, though only modest public success. He complained, throughout his career, of being misunderstood. He visited Europe and spent the better part of two years in an English fishing village. In 1884, he settled in Prout's Neck, on the Maine coast, where he gloried in having "no other man or woman within half a mile" and took little note of his growing fame. He lived there, often wintering in Florida, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean, until his death, in 1910.

The National Gallery owns three major Homers: "Breezing Up (A Fair Wind)" (1873-76), "Hound and Hunter" (1892), and "Right and Left" (1909). The first shows a fishing sailboat, with a man and three boys aboard, atilt in a stiff breeze. It is pitched at a receding angle, rising to the left, which Homer liked for boat pictures, including his epic of maritime disaster, "The Gulf Stream" (1899). The marvel

THE CURRENT CINEMA

LONERS

"Broken Flowers" and "Grizzly Man."

BY DAVID DENBY

Bill Murray has strong cheekbones, a lordly crest of hair, and thin lips that he presses together in an act that suggests self-containment more than disapproval. In Jim Jarmusch's new "Broken Flowers," as in "Rushmore" and the recent "Lost in Translation," the teasing ironist-clown of twenty years ago has vanished. At the age of fifty-four, Murray has become rather imposing—he holds the camera with little flickers of amusement in his eyes and tiny changes of emphasis and color in his voice. He's now a major actor, but in a specialized way: he doesn't extend himself much, and it's initially hard to imagine him as what he's supposed to be in "Broken Flowers," an indomitable Don Juan who leaves dozens of disappointed girls in his wake. In America, it's usually the smiling, eager fellows, the guys who never stop asking, who become successful mashers, but Murray, as he comes off here, has too much pride to ask. His character, called Don Johnston, is a loner who says very little. When his latest girlfriend (Julie Delpy) walks out on him, he sits silently on a leather couch in his big living room, topples over, and goes to sleep. As far as we can see, he doesn't want a girl; he doesn't want anything.

Murray's linking up with Jim Jarmusch is a case of Mr. Cool meeting Mr. Cool, and the result is intriguing and elegant, but not quite satisfying. Certainly, "Broken Flowers" is the best thing Jarmusch has done since his early deadpan comedies, "Stranger Than Paradise" (1984) and "Down by Law" (1986). But Jarmusch still works out of a minimalist aesthetic in which the arbitrary and the unexplained rule the screen. We're not meant to ask such things as why a retired computer entrepreneur like Don Johnston would live in what appears to be a forlorn upstate New York town; or why he has no interests or friends except for a chattering, good-hearted busybody, Winston (Jeffrey Wright), who lives next door. In conventional Hollywood terms, Don has no backstory—the swirl of life around and inside him that would make his actions credible. He's a hollow man, neutered, disconnected from everything. That, of course, is the point, but Jarmusch and Murray have combined to make him empty without establishing the reasons for the desert in his soul. How much of this movie is devoted to a freshly imagined fictional character, and how much is the product of both men's disengagement from the world?

Bill Murray plays a Don Juan on a road trip in Jim Jarmusch's new movie.

On the same day that Don's latest flame leaves him, he receives an anonymous letter from someone who says that she is an old girlfriend, informing him that she conceived a son with him almost twenty years ago. Who's the old girlfriend? Is there really a son? Winston, an amateur sleuth, sends Don out on the road in search of the four women he was dating two decades earlier. Since the letter was written on pink stationery, Winston tells Don he must take the women pink flowers and look for pink in their houses. It's a very strange quest, and, as Don tools around, half curious to see the women again, half embarrassed by what he has to ask them, the movie turns into an absurdist travelogue. We see Don looking at maps, sleeping on airplanes, driving through rural and suburban landscapes in a rented car—"a stalker in a Taurus," he calls himself—but the travel scenes are purely formal, like the chorus of a ballad. Don is stuck in Jarmusch's depressed version of America: the women's homes—a lower-middle-class bungalow, a sterile McMansion, an austerely modernist house in the suburbs, and a backwoods shack—are equally unappealing, drained of life. The cinematographer, Frederick Elmes, produces an even, gray light, which is quite handsome, in a neutralizing way, but also sobering, almost punitive—it says that this banal American stuff is all that there is.

Jarmusch's women, who don't suffer the burden of trying to be cool, have always been more alive than his men. Ellen Barkin threw a memorable fit in "Down by Law," and in one of the sketches in "Coffee and Cigarettes" Cate Blanchett, playing two roles—an obnoxious star and her envious cousin—briefly smacked some life into that remote exercise. Jarmusch has made Don's old lovers vastly different from one another, and some of the actresses do extremely well in their brief appearances, especially Sharon Stone as a hard-luck blonde who doesn't demand too much from life, and Jessica

Lange as an iron-willed fraud who "talks to animals." Creating hollows of silence and embarrassment, a hushed expectation in which anything can happen, Jarmusch is good at the awkwardness of lost love, the sadness of diminished expectations: the women are getting by, but they're not happy or creative, and Don's encounters with them are either bittersweet or just plain bitter. They all have a fondness for pink—any one of them could be the mother of his child. But Don makes no more than a gesture at connection, and as the movie ends we're left wondering: is Jarmusch's cool really a kind of fear equal to Don's fear of life? "Broken Flowers" is all of a piece; it's maliciously observed, and it has a neat formal style. But it's an art object without the energy or courage to be a work of art.

In "Grizzly Man," which opens August 12th, the indefatigable Werner Herzog has made a brilliant documentary about an American saint and fool—a man who understands everything about nature except death. This innocent is one Timothy Treadwell, a college athlete from Long Island who dropped out of school after an injury, failed as an actor, and became a California surfer who drank too much. He was a routine product of American dislocation—a washout, even—until the moment in 1989 when he had an epiphany in Alaska. Up there in the wilds, Treadwell fell in love with the enormous grizzlies that come down from the mountains in the warm weather, when the salmon are running. Starting in 1992, and for a dozen summers after that, he lived among the animals in the Katmai National Park and Preserve, almost always alone, and always without a weapon. His special province was a densely shrubbed plot of land—the Grizzly Maze, he called it—which he turned into a private petting zoo. He gave the animals—many of them weighing seven or eight hundred pounds, and outfitted with claws like yellow scythes—such names as Mr. Chocolate and Aunt Melissa, stroked their noses with his hand, and reigned in this peaceable kingdom as a kind of benevolent god. In his own eyes, he was protecting the bears from poachers and from the indifference of the park service. Treadwell was a fearless man, who could face down an enraged animal with a pointed finger and the words "Don't you do that. I love you." He was also an implacable cornball and sentimentalist, a celebrator of nature and of himself, who was capable of rhapsodizing over a steaming pile of bear droppings, which he insisted on calling poop. His Dr. Doolittle act worked extremely well, right up to the moment when it stopped working at all. In October, 2003, Treadwell and his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, were attacked and devoured by a hungry long-nosed grizzly that either came down from the mountains late or lingered after the other bears had left.

We know all this because Treadwell, a media-type guy, had a digital video camera with him during his last five summers in Alaska and shot a hundred hours of footage, which, after he died, fell into the eager hands of Werner Herzog. The great German filmmaker interviewed some of Treadwell's adoring friends and ex-girlfriends; he also talked to a variety of local naturalists and park-service officers, most of whom thought that Treadwell "stepped over the line" that separates humans from animals. Herzog then wove the "found" footage into a startling meditation on innocence and nature. Narrating in his extraordinary German-accented English, Herzog is fair-minded and properly respectful of Treadwell's manic self-invention. He even praises Treadwell as a filmmaker: as Treadwell stands talking in the foreground of the frame, the bears play behind him or scoop up salmon in sparkling water; in other shots, a couple of foxes leap across the grass in the middle of a Treadwell monologue. The footage is full of stunning incidental beauties.

In a way, "Grizzly Man" is the ultimate nature documentary, for it chronicles the nature of man as well as the nature of animals. Herzog, investigating Treadwell's earlier life, interprets him as a spiritually chaotic outcast from civilization, an impatient misfit who relieved his misanthropy with neurotic protestations of love in the wilderness. As Herzog frames it, the entire movie is a very dark joke. Yet there's an element in the comedy which Herzog may not have intended: the contrast between the self-dramatizing American, with his naïve egotism and optimism, and the hyper-cultivated European, who brings his own burden of despair to nature. Whereas the tormented Treadwell longs for harmony and doesn't seem to understand that death is at the center of any ecological balance, Herzog sees *nothing* but death. Looking into the eyes of a bear that comes close to Treadwell's camera, he discerns cruelty and mercilessness rather than hunger. Neither man, it seems, is willing to admit that a bear is a bear is a bear. ♦

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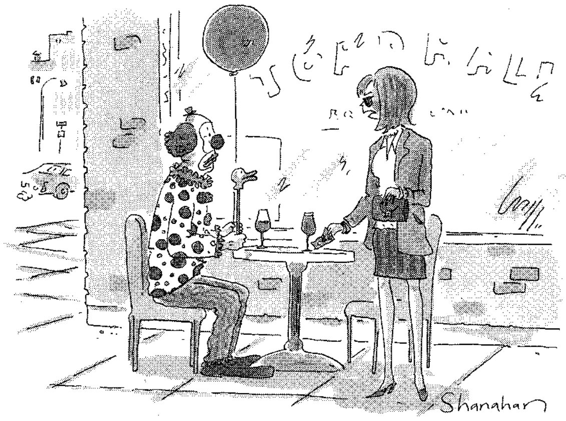
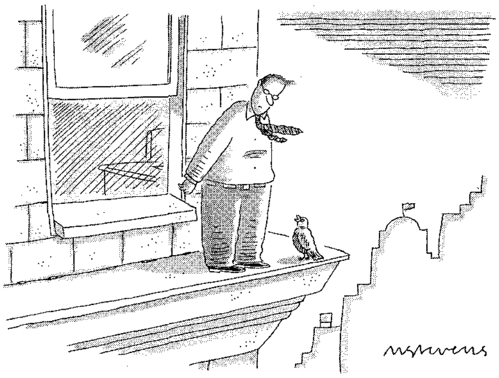
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, August 14th. Finalists in the July 25th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 29th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Well, if you must know, he makes me laugh."
Jacqueline Tager, Hollywood, Calif.



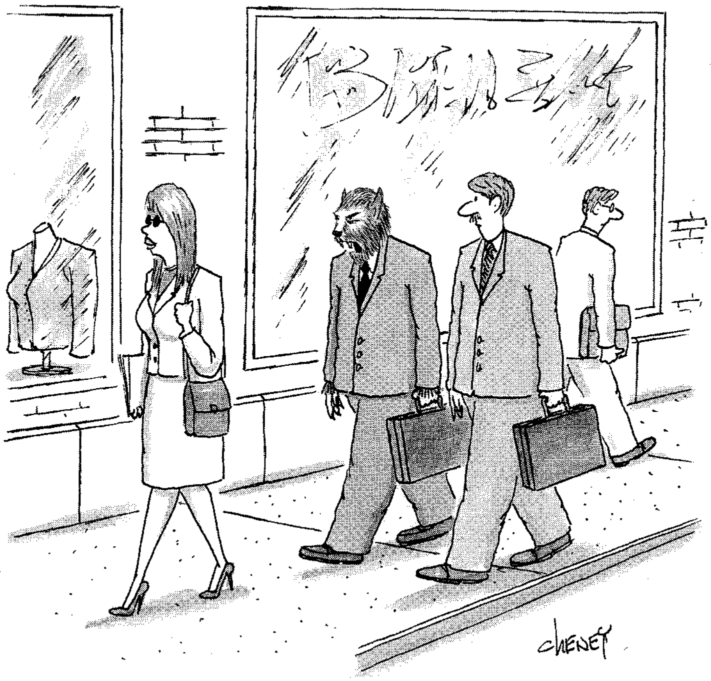
THE FINALISTS

"And tomorrow I'll teach you how to build a nest."
Jeff Cronin, Warrington, Pa.

"There's a message on my leg from Karl Rove."
Don Mullen, Huntington, N.Y.

"Can I have your apartment?"
Harold Cronson, Dallas, Texas

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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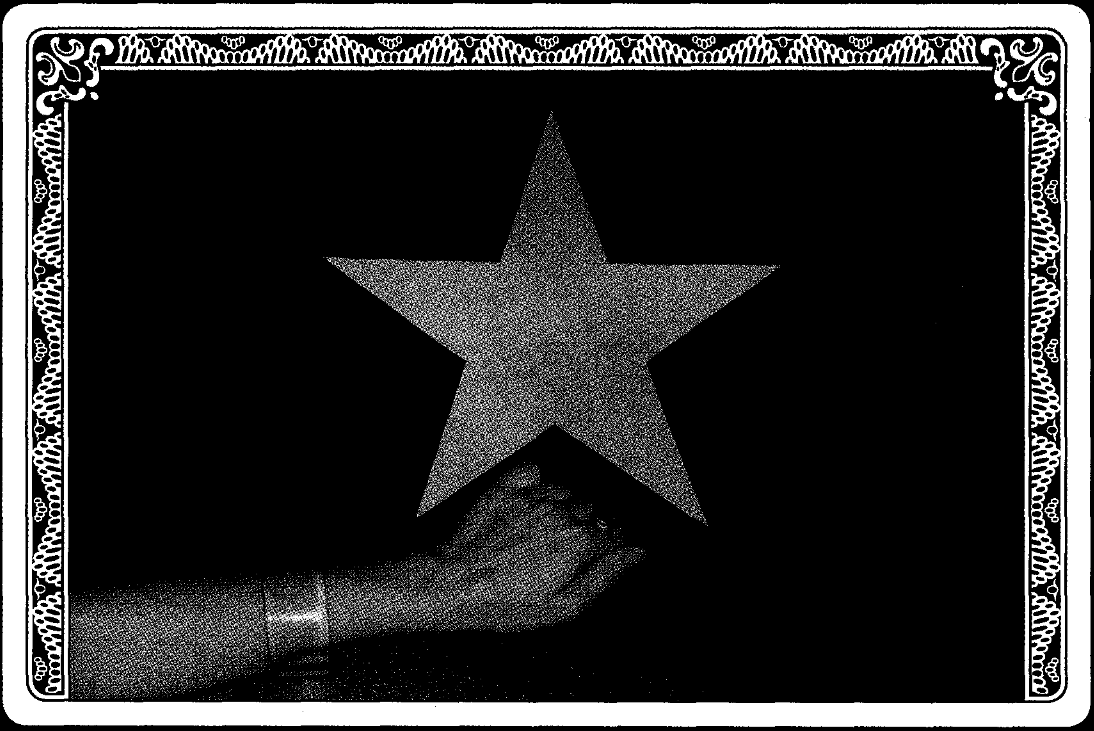

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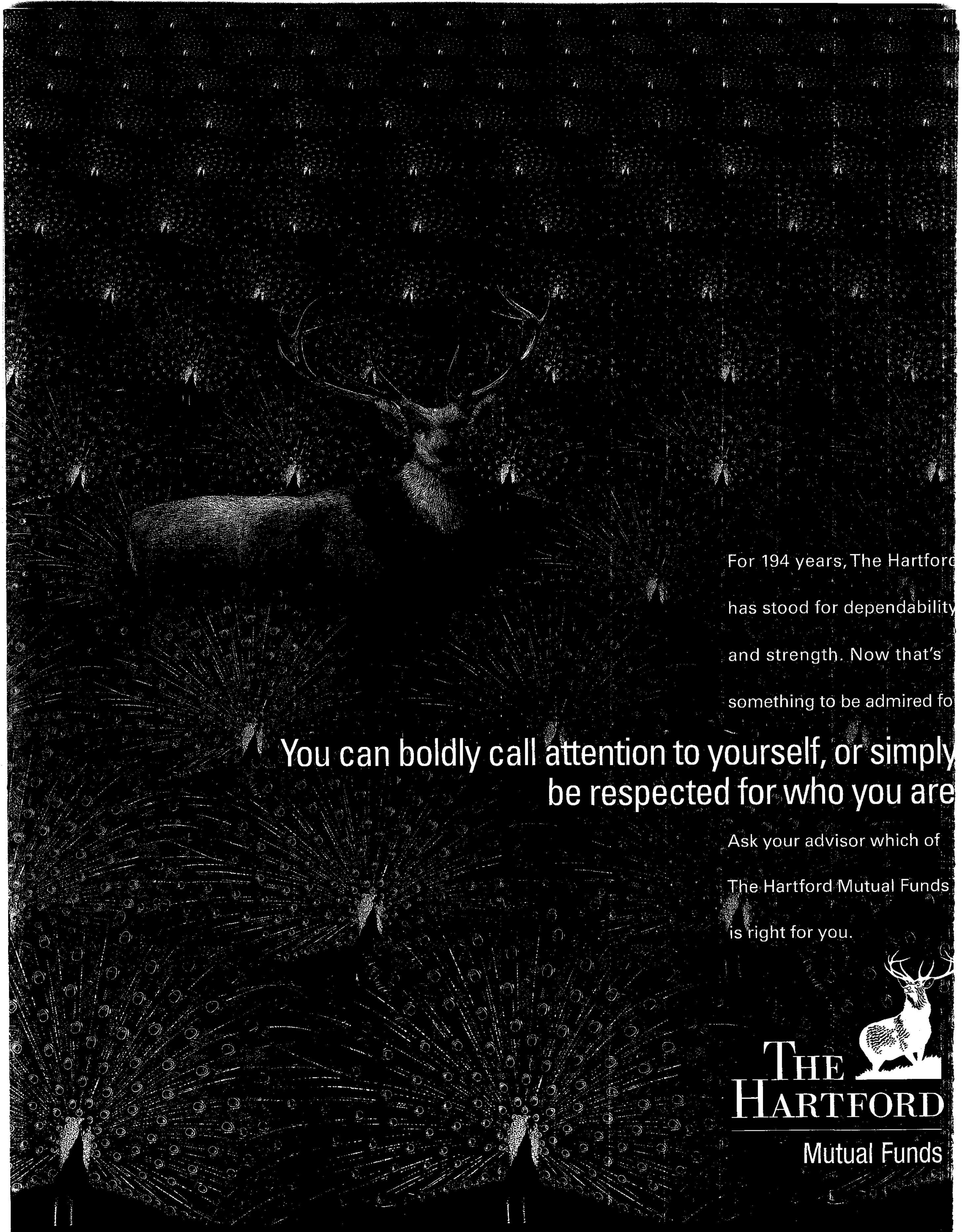
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